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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

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What does God think of Facebook?

Mike Wagenman

Last week, my friend and colleague posted on Facebook that he was deleting his Facebook account. The most critical comments asked, since he didn't want to give in to the narcissistic tendencies of Facebook any longer, why he felt that he needed to broadcast his decision to the entire universe.

I resonate with my friend's dilemma. I myself have deleted my Facebook account – only to return a short month or so later. Even today I still have an uneasy relationship with Facebook. So I can relate to my friend, and others, who question their involvement in this online social network.

But as I have reflected on this, it seems to me that the main question isn't, "Should I stay or should

I go?" It seems the most significant question we could ask is, "What does *God* think of Facebook?" And thankfully we have some resources at hand to grapple with such a provocative question.

Whatever criticisms could be leveled at Facebook or its creator Mark Zuckerberg, at the end of the day we can all admit that Facebook is a significant cultural artifact. With 800 million current active users, Facebook has cultural impact like little else in recent memory. But would Jesus join Facebook?

The question could be framed even more broadly and challengingly: Does God have any appreciation for cultural artifacts which come from outside the Christian community or which are not explicitly religious or faith-full?

How might we discover an answer to such a question? And more generally, how can Christians begin to evaluate and discern aspects of cultural development in our pluralistic and multi-faith society today?

God-given

Question 1: Am I open to recognizing and appreciating God's creative power at work through all his creatures in creating <insert cultural artifact here>? It seems to me that this must be the first question because our expectations and assumptions profoundly shape how we view the world of culture. If Christians believe that God is the Creator and that Christ sustains and directs all things to their redemptive end (Col. 1), then Christians must in principle be



Can cultural artifacts from outside the Christian community bring shalom?

open to recognizing and appreciating the cultural contributions of all God's creatures – even if they don't consciously glorify God for their divinely-given abilities.

John Calvin wasn't all doom and gloom when it came to the cultural contributions of non-Christians. Even though his name is attached today to "Total Depravity," Calvin was the one who wrote emphatically in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that "the hu-

man mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator. . . . In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver. . . . [T]heir example should teach us how many gifts the Lord has left in possession of human nature" (2.2.15). Calvin not only taught that humans are idol factories (*Institutes* 1.11.8) but also cultural artifact factories.

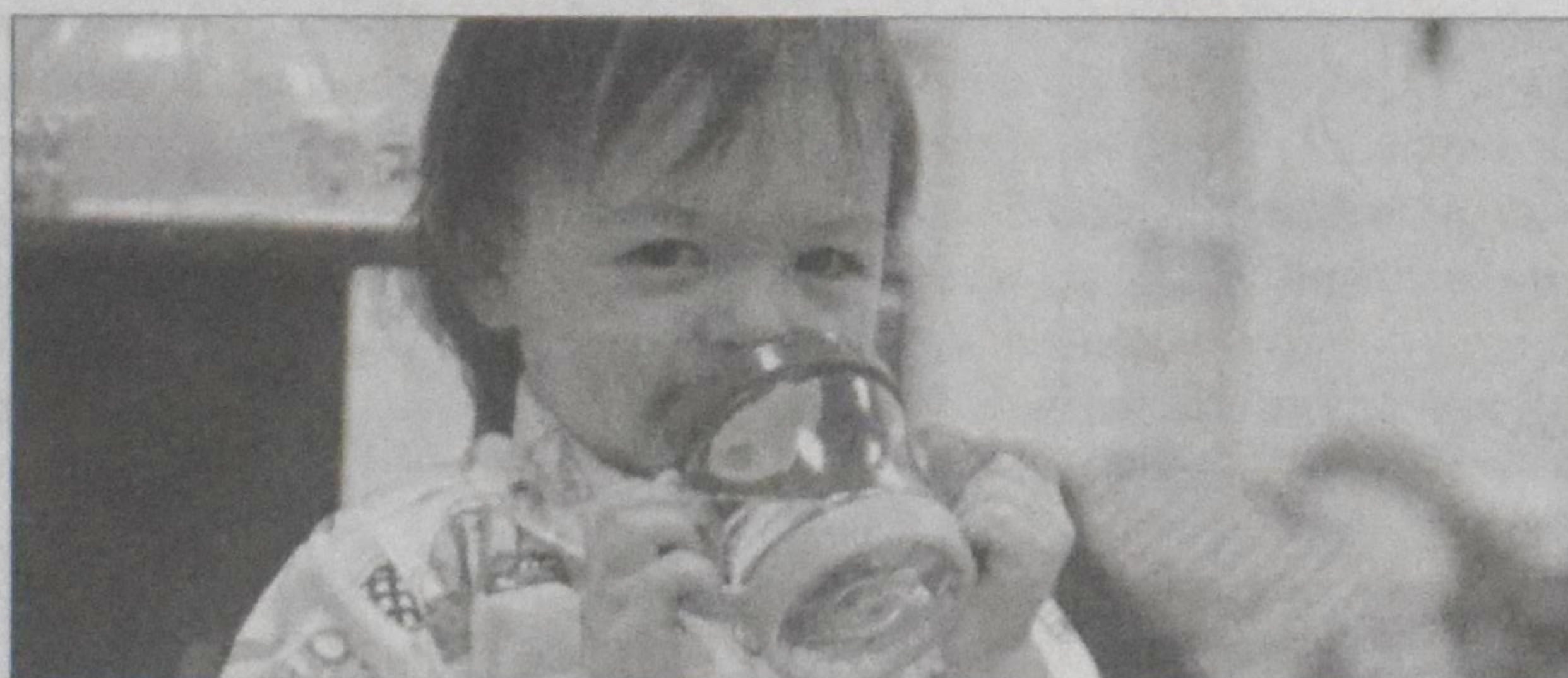
See Facebook on p.2

Behind the stereotypes

Chandra Pasma

The Idle No More movement has focused attention on Canada's First Nations, highlighting the difficult circumstances in which too many of them live. While the grassroots protests have provoked sympathy and a genuine desire for reconciliation and healing in some Canadians, in others it seems to have given cover for deeply held negative beliefs and stereotypes about First Nations peoples.

In a modern liberal democracy such as Canada, racism seldom rears its ugly head in the form of overt discrimination against people. Instead, it is far more likely to be couched in generalizations about an entire group or class of people based on so-called



What if a non-Aboriginal town had unsafe drinking water for a decade?

objective evidence. Many of these stereotypes and myths about First Nations are now circulating, and can make it difficult for a simple observer to know who is right and who is wrong. But with a closer look, many of these myths and accusations can also be debunked

for what they are – harmful stereotypes that arise from an inability or lack of desire to love and care for our Aboriginal neighbours.

All they want is money

One of the most prevalent myths circulating right now is

that all First Nations people want is money. They want us to pay them billions of dollars while they contribute nothing.

Actually, what sparked the Idle No More protests is not money, but the federal government ignoring treaty rights and constitutional obligations to consult First Nations people on matters that affect them. The two budget implementation bills of 2012 played a big role, as the Conservative government made significant changes to resource development approval and protection of Canada's waterways which will impact traditional Aboriginal lifestyles and could have a very harmful impact on the environment.

Essentially what First Nations

people are demanding is that the government speak to them before making decisions that affect them. In a democracy, that shouldn't be too much to ask.

If First Nations people were demanding more money, however, it would not be unreasonable. The federal government has jurisdiction over all programs and services for First Nations people, whereas the provinces hold jurisdiction in a number of areas for non-Aboriginal Canadians. When the total amount of spending on services to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians is compared, Aboriginal Canadians come out significantly behind. And in fact, they are falling further behind, since the federal government

See Stereotypes on p.2

News

Facebook *continued*

Can we appreciate the God-given gifts which all people use to fashion admirable cultural artifacts?

Shalom-bringing

Question 2: Is <insert cultural artifact here> good or beautiful? It may seem quite odd to wonder about the aesthetic nature of something like Facebook. But the Apostle Paul exhorts us that "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things" (Phil. 4:8). This question is asking us to consider more than whether we like the simple blue and white layout of the Facebook website. Rather, to ask whether Facebook is aesthetically good or beautiful is to ask whether it is good for the flourishing of the world. Is it beautiful in bringing shalom?

This is where things get pretty subtle. Because Facebook is both an awe-inspiring human intellectual and technical achievement as well as a vehicle for unchecked commercial greed. While Facebook is good for building relationships across insurmountable geographic distance it also facilitates stalking, bullying, voyeurism and narcissism.

Idol-making

Question 3: How does <insert cultural artifact here> reflect and contribute to cultural idolatry? We all live embedded in particular cultural contexts. These cultures are historical developments which can be read like stories having plots driven by conflicts and resolutions of conflict.

Stereotypes *continued*

Speak to us before making decisions that affect us, First Nations ask.

has capped spending growth at two percent per year, regardless of inflation and population growth. In comparison, federal spending on social services for other Canadians is growing at three percent per year, while federal spending on health care for other Canadians is growing at six percent per year.

Bad governance

Another common argument is that First Nations are the source of their own problems – because their governance is so bad. This is to tar all 600 plus First Nations bands with the high-profile struggles of a few. But before we cast blame, we need to be clear that problems with governance and problems with programs and services on-reserve are not the same thing.

To be the chief of a small First Nations band in a rural or remote community is much like being a small-town mayor – with one major exception: in addition to typical municipal services, chiefs and councils are also responsible for delivery of education, health care, social services and infrastructure including housing, roads, water and wastewater. As if that list isn't daunting enough, the funds for these services come from federal government contribution agreements that the Auditor-General of Canada has criticized as not being flexible enough and accompanied by a very heavy reporting burden.

But if a mayor in a small, rural or remote community was struggling with the expertise required to deliver all necessary services with limited funds and a significant

An important question to ask is which stories do we live in and which stories do particular cultural artifacts reflect and contribute to? Cultural idolatries grow and develop when certain aspects of a foundational cultural story take on ultimate and guiding significance.

One strand of the West's cultural story relates to the place and role of technology in human life. Technology – in its medical, scientific, or entertainment forms – is the great hope we have for engineering our happiness, security and well-being in the universe. Does Facebook reflect this storyline? How does Facebook contribute to the legitimacy of this narrative? Does Facebook help us live faithfully within the Christian story or does it bolster our belief in our cultural story?

Stepping up

Question 4: How does <insert cultural artifact here> enable us to live culturally and historically responsible lives? The French Reformed philosopher, Jacques Ellul, is not only known for his reflections on our "technological society" but also for emphasizing to us that God calls us to responsibility in our own time and place. But technology, Ellul argues, fragments life into smaller and smaller pieces to the point that no one is really responsible for the whole any longer.

Consider an example: a group of girls gang together and bully another girl via Facebook until she commits suicide. Who is responsible for this girl's tragic death? The girls who posted bullying messages? The software engineers who designed the Facebook site? The computer hardware



After her suicide, memorial Facebook pages of Todd have gathered over half a million "likes" but also further hateful messages.

engineers who built the servers and infrastructure where Facebook is housed? Mark Zuckerberg for coming up with the initial idea for Facebook? The financial investors who keep Facebook in business? The girl herself who decided to take her own life? This is Ellul's point: technology fragments life to the point that no one can be held responsible within the large, impersonal matrix of people who only contribute their little bit to the whole. How is the Christian – who is called by Jesus to self-sacrificial love and service of their neighbour and enemy – to respond responsibly to these forces of dehumanization and fragmentation?

What does God think of Facebook? I hope these four questions equip us to wrestle with such a question. There may be other questions which can help us sort out our responsibility to our cultural and historical setting, but these four give us a good start. In two weeks, I hope to explore how Facebook participates (or doesn't) with other more traditional institutions in the development of personal identity today.

Mike Wagenman is the Director of The Kuyper Centre for Emerging Scholars (kuypercenter.ca) at Western University. The next issue of CC, March 11, will carry the conclusion of this series: "The gospel in a post-Christian, Facebook world."



Choosing to be Idle No More

Christina DeVries

The need for listening and hearing another person's story was woven through each part of the recent reForming Relationships Conference at Redeemer University College on Feb. 9, a day designed to explore reconciliation and Indigenous justice. As each workshop leader and participant picked up a stone, they acknowledged their own story as important. These stones served as a constant reminder, throughout the day, that we each have a voice that must be heard to bring about true reconciliation. These stones were witness to all that was heard and spoken in the various workshops, during the panel discussion, and while people engaged Ovide Bighetty's art series *Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin – The Creator's Sacrifice*.

The keynote address, from Lori Ransom (member of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation and a Senior Advisor for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada), called for renewed prayer and active participation in transforming relationships between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people in Canada. Ransom invited us to recognize the role we play in the story of the Original People. She challenged us to think about our dreams for Canada and about how these dreams will be achieved through "loving our neighbours as ourselves." Ransom stressed that we cannot be strangers anymore and, instead, we must spend time

with our Indigenous neighbours and listen to their stories. Through this mutual understanding and respect, relationships are formed and reconciliation can come.

After this call to action, we were privileged to hear different perspectives and stories surrounding land claim rights. It is through hearing these voices that we had an opportunity to experience the value in becoming educated about Indigenous justice issues and histories. It is only after we know how we got to the point we are at now that we can move forward to a better future. As we learn, we become more effective participants in the journey of reconciliation.

As the day closed, we were reminded of the sacredness of the stories and moments shared throughout the day. We were invited to exchange stones with someone else to symbolize holding each other accountable to respect the stories of another and learn from them. We then released the stones back into the hands of the Creator by building a cairn to landmark this point of our journey. In this way, we honoured the land, the Original Peoples, and the relationships that God the Creator has created between people. In this way, we acknowledged we can do nothing without the Creator holding all of life and all relationships in his hands.

Christina DeVries of Hamilton, Ont. is a supply teacher on the Six Nations reserve in Ohsweken.

paper burden, we would construct ways to provide support and training, through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities or through federal and provincial programs. First Nations communities currently receive that kind of support (although not as much as they need) from Tribal Councils, which provide a regional group of First Nations with professional expertise that may not be available at the local level. Unfortunately, the Conservative government has significantly slashed funding to these Tribal Councils.

All Canadians are equal

One common response to the Idle No More protests has been "What would happen if non-Aboriginal Canadians

were blocking major highways, railways or border crossings?" One might equally ask "What if a non-Aboriginal town hadn't had safe drinking water in over a decade?" Too many First Nations peoples have lived in Third World conditions despite our G8 economy. Instead of allowing racist assumptions to blame the victims, we need to start asking ourselves whether we truly believe all people are equal, and if so, why we allow such conditions to persist in a country blessed with such a wealthy economy.

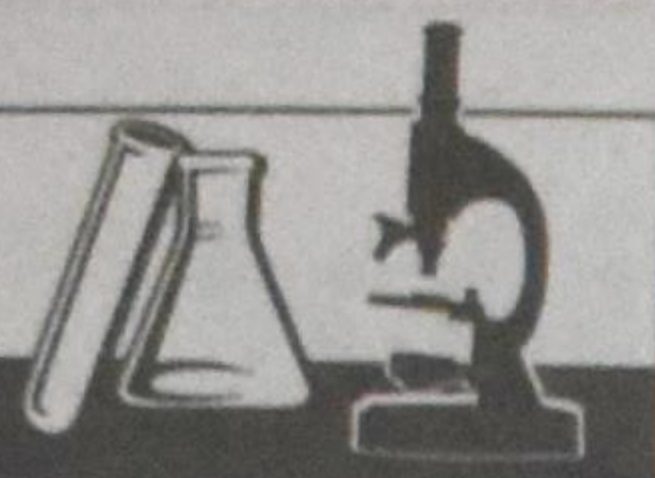
Chandra Pasma is an Ottawa-based policy analyst.



News

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



Polio eradication interrupted – A profound sadness



The attack and remarkable recovery of the 15-year-old Pakistani girl, Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in the head because she publicly supported girls' right to receive an education, has attracted widespread media attention. Not as well noted but potentially more significant is

the murder in December of nine polio eradication workers in Pakistan, six of whom were women. A further seven aid workers were killed on New Year's Day. While these deaths are personally tragic for the workers' families and associates, the deaths may also lead to extended long-term global suffering.

No one has claimed responsibility for these attacks, but they have had an unfortunate effect on the anti-polio drive in Pakistan and surrounding region. The program to eradicate polio, a viral disease that attacks the nerves and causes paralysis, has been dealt a setback that may lead to its failure in this part of the world, with global consequences.

When I was a child, everyone received a smallpox vaccination, and before my family could immigrate to Canada, our smallpox vaccinations had to be confirmed. However, the worldwide vaccination campaign organized by the World Health Organization eradicated smallpox in 1977, one of the remarkable successes of the modern age. People today no longer have to fear this disease with its 35 percent mortality rate. My children and grandchildren have not been vaccinated against this age-old enemy.

For diseases like smallpox and polio to be successfully defeated, we need to ensure that there are no live cases of the disorder anywhere in the world for a period of time. Without any active cases, the disease cannot be transmitted further to others, and it becomes extinct.

Success in such a campaign requires an amazing amount of practical work. The vaccine needs to be easily administered; the polio vaccine is given orally. It also needs to be transportable to very remote locations without modern conveniences such as refrigeration. Polio exists in multiple variations, so the vaccine needs to be tailored to the specific strain found in a given area, just like the flu shot vaccine is different each year. Then it needs to be administered to almost everyone in an area at more or less the same time. Clearly, an anti-disease campaign such as this is a massive logistical effort involving thousands of workers.

Painfully close

Currently we are close to achieving success with polio, turning it into an extinct disease. In most of the world, no cases of polio have been reported in years. Polio is still active, however, in three regions: Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria. A massive vaccination campaign was launched in



Before these setbacks, 2013 was hoped to be the year that would end polio.

2010 to attack these last pockets of humanity. The hope was that this year humanity would succeed in vaccinating enough people to finally make polio extinct. The attacks on the polio workers have dealt this campaign a severe setback.

This setback is not the first. In 2003 and 2004 the effort to eradicate polio in Nigeria was almost completed when several northern provinces banned the vaccinations for political and religious reasons. In the next few years, the polio virus returned to 20 countries setting back the eradication effort for years. Now 10 years later, the fear is that we may face a similar setback even when we are so close to success.

In this campaign the World Health Organization has worked very hard with political factions and religious communities explaining the reason for the vaccinations and building trust with local leaders. Even in conflict situations these efforts have been successful, and workers have largely been able to continue with the eradication program. Thus it is with a profound sense of sadness and loss that we see the potential global consequences of these deaths. If the virus is carried from the few pockets in which it currently is found, then the whole process of eradication will have to be re-initiated. In late breaking news on

January 24, the poliovirus from Pakistan was found in sewage samples in Egypt, and Egyptians are ramping up a vaccine campaign there.

As a Christian community we can only pray that the efforts to banish this ancient enemy are successful. Our sympathies go out to the families and associates of those who died in this noble effort.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who has the three smallpox vaccination marks on his arm and has been vaccinated against polio, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

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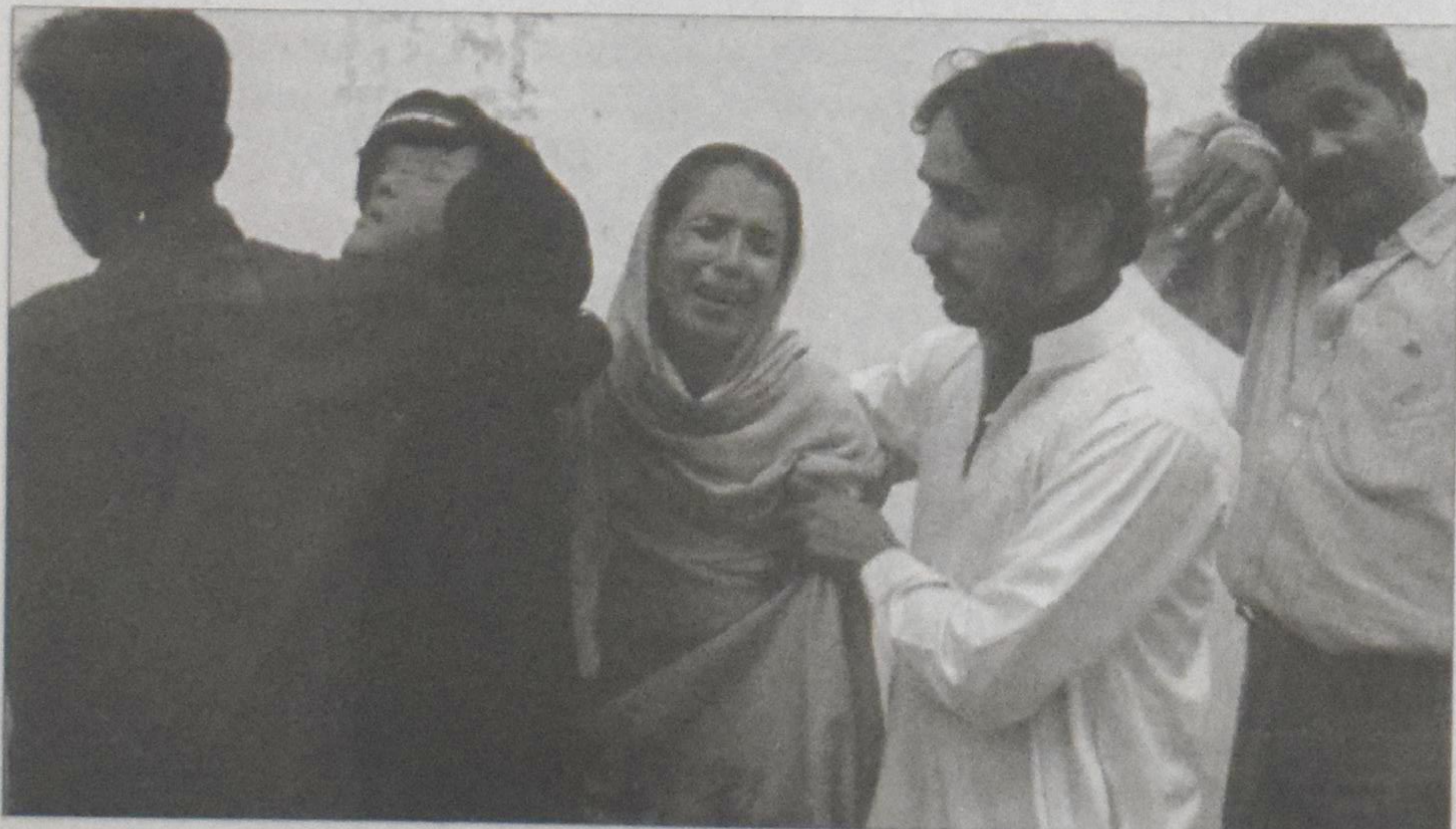
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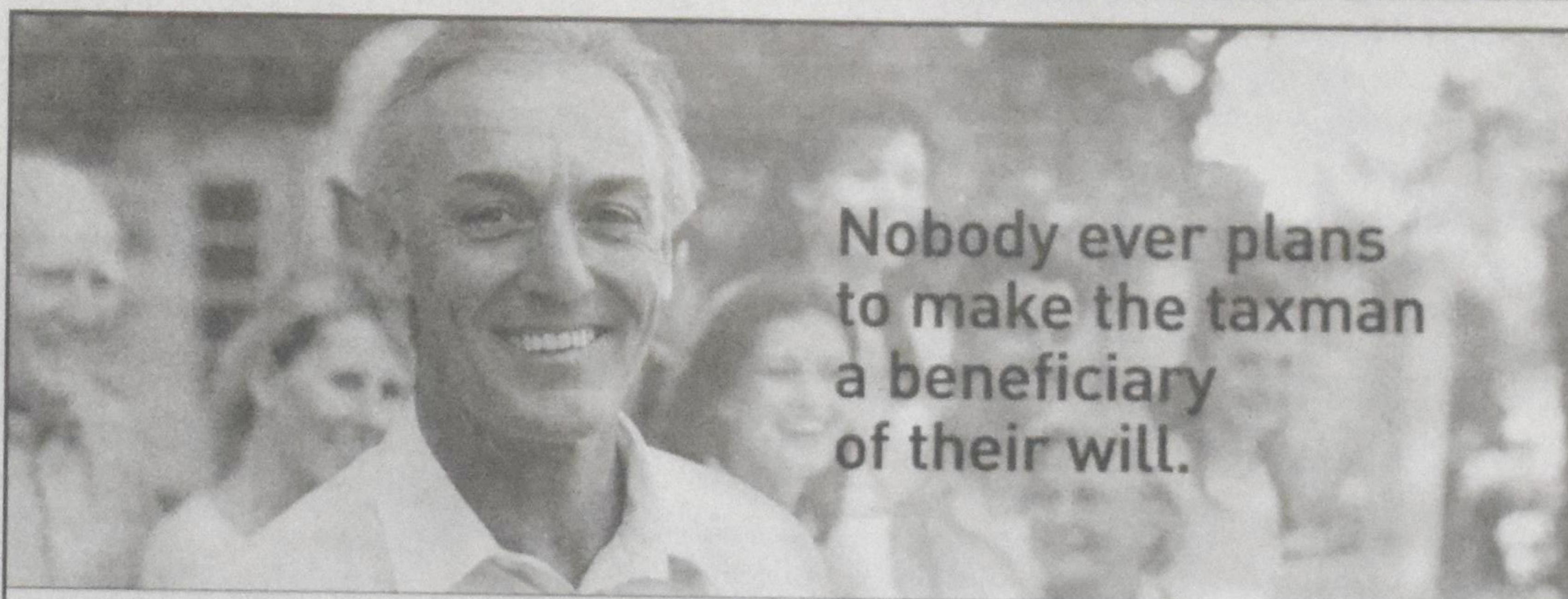


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Mourning family members of one of the slain polio workers, Nasimi Bibi.

REUTERS



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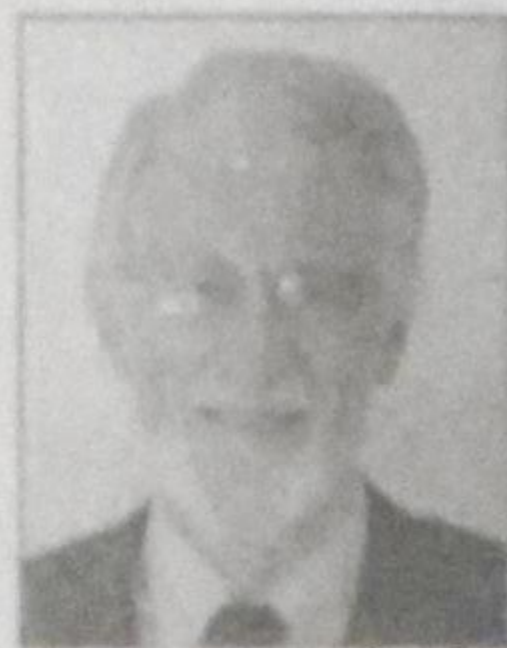
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Editorials

Dona nobis pacem



Henry Baron

In the world's most memorable sermon, the Man of Galilee said to a world haunted by violence: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

It's a moonless night in a small, poor village in Galilee, not far from Nazareth. In a dimly lit cinder block home, a woman lies dying. A priest sits with her, holding her cold, tremulous hand. Toward the dark morning hours, her breathing stops. The priest offers to deliver the news to the grieving son's three brothers. But the son stiffens, scowls, and says: "If they set foot in this house, we will kill each other." For the truth is that the brothers have such hate in their hearts for each other that even the death of their mother cannot bring them together.

These brothers are believers, once active in their village church. Their vicious hostility toward each other has infected others, like an invisible toxic fog seeping through the walls of souls and spreading its evil poison. Fathers won't speak to sons, mothers and daughters spread false rumours about each other. Most of the Christians in this village no longer show up in church.

Except for Holy Week. On Palm Sunday every seat is taken, though the hostility is palpable. The feuding brothers are there also, but sitting widely apart from each other.

Before the benediction and dismissal, the priest descends from the pulpit and strides toward the back of the church. He locks the huge double doors with a chain and padlock. Returning to the front, he faces his astonished congregation. The priest now turns prophet: he confronts God's people who have become lost in their hate and malice.

"If you can't love your brother," he thunders, "whom you see, how can you say you love God who is invisible? I have failed to unite you, but there is someone who can. His name is Jesus Christ, who gives you power to forgive. And if you will not forgive, we will stay locked in here. You can kill each other and I'll provide your funerals gratis."

Silence. Tight lips. Clenched fists. Stony glares. But silence, as the minutes crawl by in agonizing slowness.

Then the mysterious power of God invades. Someone rises. It is the man who would not let his brothers come to mourn their mother's death. Head lowered, voice faltering, the hardness of his heart melting with the irresistible grace of God, he turns to his fellow villagers: "I have hated my brothers enough to want to kill them. I need forgiveness more than any."



The church in Ibillin today, its steps engraved with Matt. 5.

He turns to the priest now. "Can you forgive me, too, Father?"

They move toward each other, embrace, give the kiss of peace, and of forgiveness. The repentant brother now moves down the aisle, where, the wonder of it all, his three brothers rush to meet him. They hold each other in a long, tearful embrace of forgiveness and long-denied love.

God's peace that's beyond understanding descends on the congregation. People who haven't spoken to each other for years now weep together. Repentance and forgiveness mingle in a holy stream of divine grace. A second service follows, a joyous service of love and reconciliation. Afterward, the transformed spill into the streets. Groups move from house to house to ask forgiveness for a certain wrong. And, amazingly, it's always freely given.

Today, more than 40 years later, that once almost forgotten village of Ibillin in northern Galilee is a pilgrim and tourist destination. The man from Galilee, Elias Chacour, is now Archbishop, Leader of the Melkite Catholic Church of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and all Galilee, the first Palestinian leader of the Palestine Christians in the Holy Land. I read about him in his book *Blood Brothers*.

The dilapidated church he came to has been replaced by a beautiful and thriving Church of the Sermon on the Mount located on the campus of the Mar Elias Educational Institutions, named after the prophet Elijah. Founded by Father Chacour, the eight schools include kindergarten through high school, a gifted student program, technical college, theological school and university, and open to students of all races and religions. More than half are Muslims.

We long for peace: within our heart, our family, our church, our land, our world. But how serious are we about peacemaking? Is our church and denomination a force for peace? Are our politics? Do we know about organizations like Peace Direct, Peace Action, Peace Now, or the Canadian Peace Alliance, and do we offer them our participation and support?

If we are not peacemakers, can we still be the sons and daughters of God? ➤

Henry Baron (baro@calvin.edu) is Professor of English emeritus at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Henry and his wife, Ruth, will be part of a Calvin Alumni pilgrimage tour to Israel in March. Ibillin is on the itinerary, too.

Drones and spiritual warfare



Bert Witvoet

There was a time when a crossbow was considered an undesirable weapon, its use an unethical escalation of violence in warfare. A crossbow could shoot farther and penetrate more deeply into the enemy's armour than the simple bow and arrow.

We have come a long way. Today missile-delivering drones are the equivalent of the crossbow. And they are being deployed almost exclusively against Islamic terrorists. It is estimated that between 3,000 to 4,000 terrorists have been killed by drones in what has been described as America's silent war. The United States has a huge advantage over its enemies when it is able to destroy them with a drone-delivered missile remotely controlled maybe a few thousands miles away. Some critics call that an unethical use of force.

It certainly is a form of weapon escalation. But the advantage that comes from a more powerful or smarter weapon is always temporary. Sooner or later, the enemy will catch up. The time will come when al-Qaeda terrorists will send drones into the sky to spew out their destructive payload on our heads. The answer seems to be, if you follow the logic of our weapon industry, that we always have to be one step ahead of the opponent. If we manage to keep our economies strong and our scientists focused on smarter technology, then we can maintain our advantage for some time to come.

But critics raise the ethical issue of civilian fatalities as a result of drone attacks. That may be a valid concern, although warfare always carries with it the unfortunate result of "collateral damage." An article in *The Economist* of July 30, 2011, suggests that research has shown that in 2010, 95 percent of fatalities in Pakistan caused by drones were those of militants. That is five percent too many civilian fatalities, but any military action might like to have that low a percentage of unintended fatalities.

Using drones to kill enemies has another ethical issue attached to it. Killing human lives should never become a technological game. If you never see the face of the enemy when you decide to end his life, you lose the proper awareness that war is tragic and that killing is a monstrous thing to do. It's a well-known fact that when rookie soldiers shoot at the enemy, they often shoot to miss. Warfare should never develop into an exciting manipulation of buttons and switches.

But at the heart of this military-driven sense of security lies a greater problem for humankind. Where do we seek our security? What about the demands of peace? What about the drive for human relations and national relations that practise the art of forgiveness and vulnerability? How can the peaceable kingdom of Christ ever find acknowledgement if we put our trust in the warhorses of our time?

Pursuing peace

I'm not naive enough to think that we can bring about peace into this world just by being vulnerable and loving. Nor am I suggesting that we should send our armies home and limit ourselves to peace-making. I am glad that the French army went into Mali and drove the al-Qaeda rebels, who terrorized and enslaved the natives, further north. Still, the war in Mali against al-Qaeda is far from over, and the source of the problem of Islamic terrorism is not being addressed. I am wondering: What if we spent as much time and resources on the pursuit of peace as we do on maintaining a military force? Military might will never be the final answer to terrorism.

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Letters

For I was hungry, and you set up an organization

I enjoyed Peter VanderZaag's reflection on the Foodgrains Bank in the context of his lifetime of engagement with hunger and food ("Thoughtful Food Aid," Jan. 14, 2013). Having just read a couple of books about North Korea, I too was appalled at the continuance of the Kim Dynasty's running a nation on terror. I am less convinced, however, that giving them food is an "enabling behaviour," for to deny them food is also evil.

Ending hunger was never going to be easy. Like poverty, with which it is closely associated, the systemic or root causes are often complex and deeply rooted. The idea that resource, training, idea and technology transfers (development assistance) would be sufficient to overcome all this was perhaps naive. For many involved in international development work, the goal was to help by pushing in "the right direction" rather than solve the problem entirely. And the fashion of "the right direction" has changed from time to time. But the intent has been, for the most part, altruistic. And the results have been partial and incremental – often positive but sometimes negative.

There is increasing scrutiny over the role of development assistance in general. The widespread political shift to the right is challenging this continued international transfer of resources. The critics point out the partial and incremental results that have been obtained with the use of aid and there is truth in this. They use this as a justification for trying other approaches. The proposed approaches include cutting aid transfers (arguing that these aid transfers are part of the problem), promoting more free trade (with many caveats for the more powerful countries) or promoting handing the problem over to the major sources of economic power (the trans-national corporations), often through the use of government aid incentives.

This challenge strikes at the heart of ethos of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and its members. As Christian organizations, their focus is on "the least of these," those at the bottom of the global distribution of life's essentials. Furthermore, the injunction of Jesus in Matthew 25 is to undertake activities that are also partial and incremental – feed the hungry, visit

On grosbeaks and chickadees

Thank you for publishing Curt Gesch's poem (Jan. 28, 2013). Your paper arrived today, and the poem spoke, prompting the following response:

Dear 2012-12-24,

... a pleasure of grosbeaks, yes.

A delightful contrast to the horror of cars endured along a particular mid-day stretch of Highway 16, curbside pools of slush and mud mindlessly hurtled without a sideways glance; their pleasure, not mine.

It isn't until my 'cycle climbs the hill up Slack that creation's calm returns; today it was the chickadees celebrating the warmth of sun, the joy of early spring.

Peter Rhebergen
Smithers, B.C.

the prisoners, clothe the naked, give water to the thirsty. These are actions of love and compassion but not of deep systemic change. And they reflect the core of the actions undertaken by the Foodgrains Bank network. Recognizing the larger (and more complex) systemic roots of poverty and hunger, the Foodgrains Bank, on behalf of its members, has also directed modest efforts towards systemic issues. These include international trade policy, better use of governmental aid and promoting economic human rights, particularly the right to food, which is a way of lending legal force to this concern for "the least of these."

What do you think? Do followers of Jesus have an unconditional requirement to continue to "give them something to eat" regardless of the surrounding circumstances?

C. Stuart Clark,
Special Advisor
Canadian Foodgrains Bank

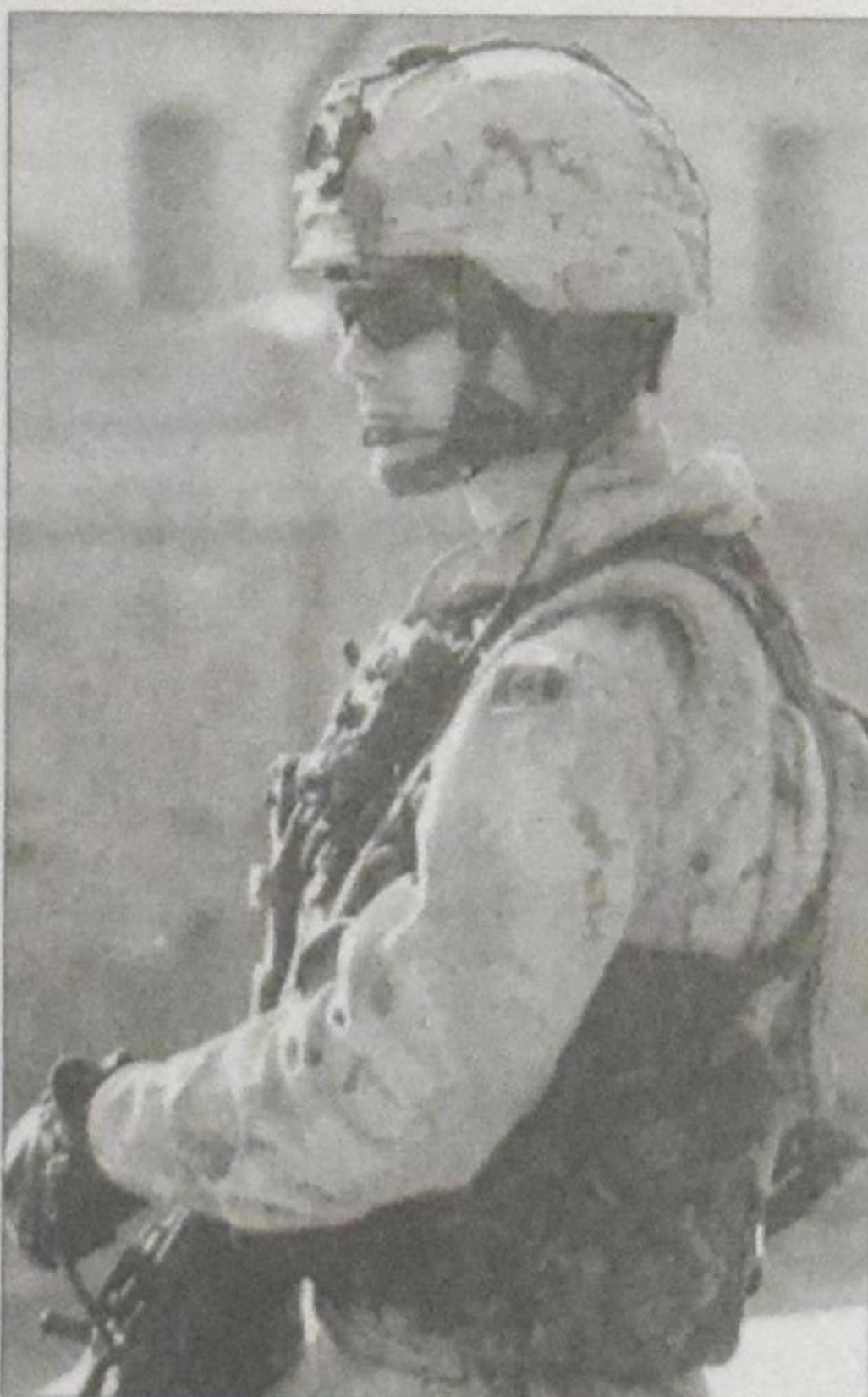
Drones and spiritual warfare *continued*

The authors of *Islam at the Crossroads: Understanding Its Beliefs, History, and Conflicts*, Paul Marshall, Roberta Greene and Lela Gilbert, point out that the conflict between radical Islamists and the rest of the world, including moderate Muslims, is about religion. "While poverty, ignorance, globalization and U.S. policy may play some part, the root of the wave of terrorism is extremist religion" (107).

They make the following recommendation: "The battle can be decided only among Muslims. But we can play a part. In terms of terrorism, we must, of course, respond with force when Islamists try to kill us. For the rest, we must recognize and support the voices of moderate Islam. We must defend them from their enemies [as in Mali] within their own religion, for extremists are our enemies too" (113).

I would add, that if the root of the problem is extremist religion, then we must address that root by using spiritual weapons. We must rededicate ourselves to spreading Christ's religion of peace at home and abroad. Secondly, we must pray without ceasing for the extremist's version of religion to fail in its advance. There are no drones that can come as close to hovering over each human heart and shooting missiles of light and love with such precision as the Holy Spirit. There will be no unintended fatalities, and the escalation of peace will be a welcome result. ✕

Bert Witvoet lives in St. Catharines, Ont. He once talked to a moderate Imam, who declared that he lamented the fact that Christianity in Canada has declined since he immigrated here in the 1960s.



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News

Saudi Arabia arrests 53 Ethiopian Christians at private worship service

DAMMAM, Saudi Arabia (WEA) – Early this month Saudi authorities arrested 53 Ethiopian Christians, mostly women, who were attending a morning worship service in the private, rented home of an Ethiopian believer. The home is in Dammam, the capital of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

Forty-six women and six men, including three church leaders, were arrested, a close relative of one of those arrested told a member of the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission. The three church leaders, two of them women, were produced in an Islamic court in Dammam the same day when authorities alleged they were converting Muslims to Christianity, the source added.

All but two of the Ethiopians were expected to be deported (the two not deported had residential permits).

Dammam, a center for petroleum and natural gas and all commerce in the eastern parts of the kingdom, is a large metropolitan, industrial area and a major seaport. However, religious freedom is not granted to the numerous visitors and expats in the region as it generally is elsewhere in the nation. A Saudi girl who embraced Christianity and fled Dammam in September 2012 was granted asylum in Sweden last month, according to *Al-Yaum* newspaper.

In December 2011, Saudi authorities arrested 35 Ethiopian Christians, 29 of them women, for “illicit mingling,” after police arrested them during a raid on a private prayer gathering in Jeddah. The women were taken into police custody and subjected to arbitrary body cavity searches, according to Human Rights Watch.

“We call on Saudi authorities to treat all those arrested with dignity, and release them imme-

diately as there is apparently no evidence for any offense against them,” said Godfrey Yogarajah, executive director of the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission. “Arrest of believers for peacefully gathering for worship goes against the spirit of Saudi Arabia’s promotion of inter-religious dialogue in international fora.”

The Religious Liberty Commission monitors freedom of religion in more than 100 nations, defends persecuted Christians, informs the global church, challenges the church to pray and gives assistance to those who are suffering. The commission also makes fact finding trips and meets with governments and ambassadors speaking up for the suffering brothers and sisters. At the United Nations, the commission reports about the situation and arranges special hearings with Christians from countries under pressure. ➤

Britain: Kids of divorce more likely to do badly at school, says study

LONDON (TCI) – Children whose parents divorce after they turn seven are more likely to misbehave and perform badly at school than are children from stable families, according to a new government-funded study in Britain.

The study by the Childhood Well-being Research Centre analyzed two major surveys of thousands of children. The centre looked at the impact of dozens of family factors on children. It revealed that children who are brought up in homes where rules are enforced display strong verbal skills and are more likely to do well in school exams.

Parents who argue and children made to move to a new school after age seven were also found to be stressful events associated with doing badly at school. “These findings highlight the continuing significance of family separation, conflict and



Overhearing arguments and switching schools negatively affect academic performance.

dissolution on the educational attainment and well-being outcomes of young adolescents,” says the study.

The research was published by the U.K. Department for Education. The study backs recent remarks by shadow public-health minister Diane Abbott. Abbott said family breakdown causes society’s biggest health issues. She said family units are vital, and doctors have told her broken families cause much of the drug and alcohol abuse they come across. ➤

American Boy Scouts delay vote on ending gay membership ban



Scouts currently pledge to stay physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.

WASHINGTON D.C. (CNA) – The Boy Scouts of America announced early this month that they will delay for three months a vote on reversing their ban on gay membership. When the decision is made in May it will affect 2.7 million boys and men in the Scouts.

Notice of the postponement came on the day when 1,400 voting members of the national council were supposed to either reaffirm or overturn the ban on gay members, including scout leaders.

“After careful consideration and extensive dialogue within the Scouting family, along with comments from those outside the organization,” said Deron Smith,

director of public relations for the organization, “the volunteer officers of the Boy Scouts of America’s national executive board concluded that due to the complexity of this issue, the organization needs time for a more deliberate review of its membership policy.”

Smith asserted that organizations that sponsor and oversee scouting groups, such as churches, would not be ordered “to act in ways inconsistent with that organization’s mission, principles or religious beliefs.”

Corporate financial pressure

In late January, the Boy Scouts

of America said they were considering ending their national ban on gay membership following the loss of funding from high-profile donors, particularly UPS (United Parcel Service). The UPS Foundation has a “diversity” program which supports numerous pro-homosexual groups.

The Family Research Council, a conservative Christian group, said it was “encouraged” by the delay in changing the national policy. Tony Perkins, president of the council, thanked the Boy Scouts for continuing to maintain their national membership standards and thanked the Scout parents who expressed “an overwhelming outpouring of support for maintaining the Scouts’ timeless values.”

Perkins said, however, that a delay “is not enough.” He called on Boy Scout officials to “publicly re-affirm their current standards, as they did just last July.” He also warned of “grave consequences” should the Boy Scouts “change their policy and compromise their moral standards in the face of threats from corporate elites and homosexual activists.”

More than 40 organizations, including the Media Research Center, Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, Concerned



High-profile donors are pressuring the Scouts to accept gay members, while other groups say “maintain your timeless values.”

Women for America and the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, joined the Family Research Council in asking the Boy Scouts to retain their current national membership rules.

The organizations took out an advertisement on Feb. 4 in the nationwide newspaper *USA Today* saying that the current rule is consistent with the Scout oath keep oneself “morally straight.” The ad also added that the current policy helps to protect scouts from sexual abuse and helps parents

maintain control over their children’s sexual education. “To compromise moral principles under political and financial pressure,” the ad said, “would teach boys cowardice, not courage.”

The Scout Oath says, “On my honour I will do my best /To do my duty to God and my country /and to obey the Scout Law;/To help other people at all times;/To keep myself physically strong,/ mentally awake, and morally straight.” ➤

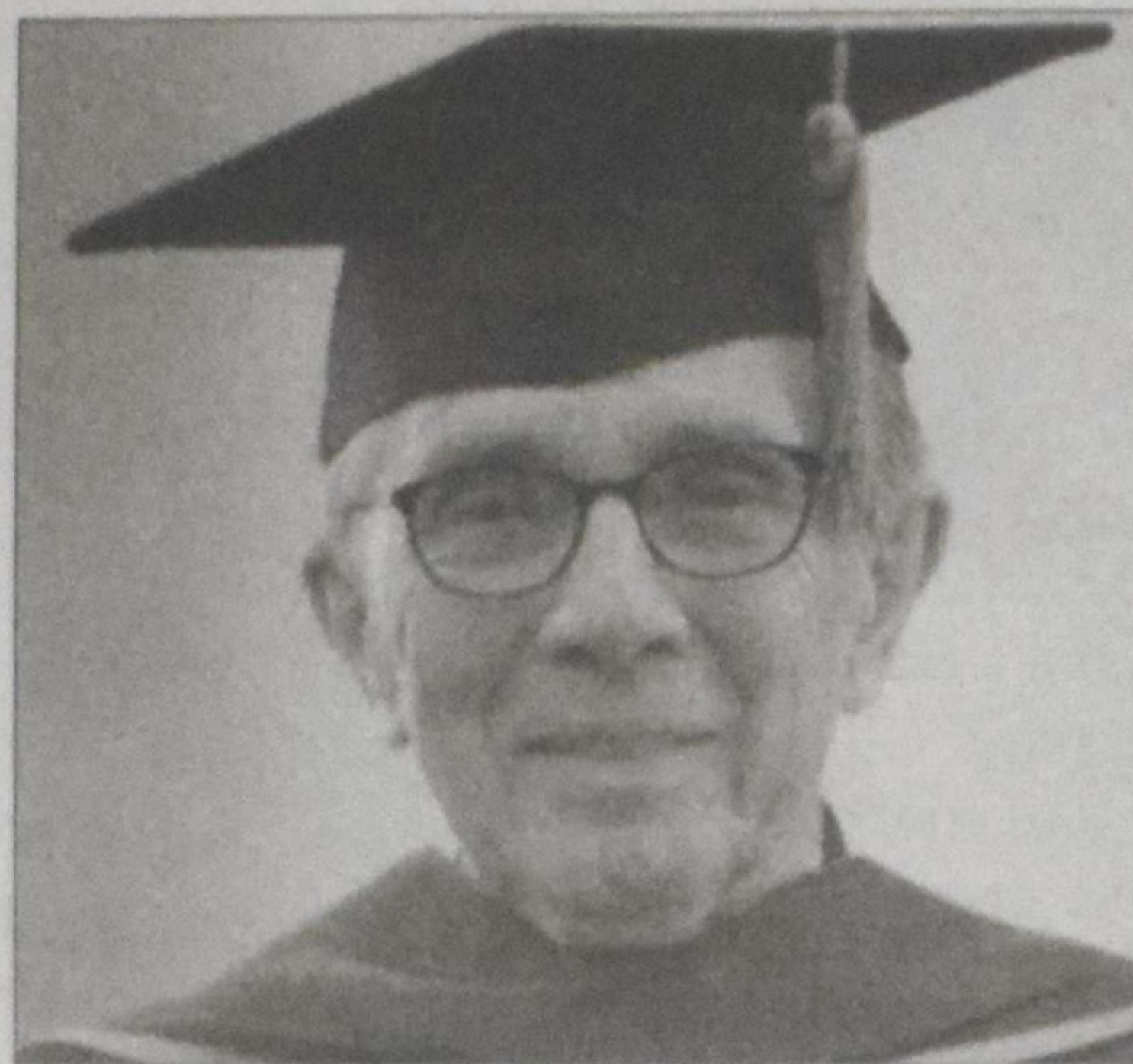
News

Dordt emeritus president Hulst passes away

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa (DC) – Dr. John B. Hulst, the second president of Dordt College, died on Friday, February 8, 2013, in Pella, Iowa. Hulst was 83 years old.

“The importance of John’s leadership to Dordt College and the Kingdom of God throughout the world has been incredible,” said President Erik Hoekstra. “John’s engaging mind, his servant’s heart, his encouraging spirit and his tireless work ethic have been a gift to many. We give thanks and praise to God for his life, and we pray for those closest to him as they mourn his earthly passing and celebrate his reunion with Christ, John’s sure Savior, Redeemer, Defender and Friend.”

During his tenure as president of Dordt College Hulst helped develop a strong faculty. He broadened the connections of the college and its students to people and institutions around the world, bringing in students and professors from other cultures and expanding the available options for off-campus programs. Under Hulst Dordt’s master of education program began, the college received its first \$1 million gift, enrollment grew, the percentage of faculty with Ph.D.s increased, and a bold plan for future campus buildings began to be implemented.



Dordt’s library was named in honour of Dr. Hulst and his wife, Louise.

Hulst was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but spent much of his adult life in Iowa. Raised and later ordained in the Christian Reformed Church, Hulst remained a CRC pastor throughout his life. He served two churches in Iowa (Ireton and First, Orange City) and one in Michigan (12th Avenue, Jenison) before he began teaching theology at Dordt College in 1968.

Hulst remained associate pastor at First CRC in Sioux Center during his years at Dordt and preached regularly well into his

retirement. In 2011 he was named one of two Distinguished Alumni of Calvin Theological Seminary for “bringing unusual credit to their *alma mater* by their distinction in Christian ministry.”

Over the years, Hulst moved from theology professor to campus pastor to dean of students to president. He served as president from 1982 to 1996. In 2002 Dordt honoured the Hulsts by naming the renovated library the John and Louise Hulst Library. Louise Hulst served as Dordt’s librarian for many years.

Faith informing all of life

Hulst had a deep passion for developing and promoting a biblically Reformed perspective that acknowledges God’s sovereignty over all of life. He was, of course, committed to Christian education, but also promoted a Christian understanding of politics and daily living. He helped found NACPA (the National Association for Christian Political Action) in the 1970s and remained an ardent supporter of its offshoot, the Center for Public Justice, in Washington, D.C.

For many years Hulst was active in the Reformed Ecumenical Council. He was a leader of the International Association for

the Promotion of Christian Higher Education, and a board member of the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto. He was a driving force behind the Association for Reformed Institutions of Higher Education (ARIHE), an effort to establish a Reformed university in North America. “I’m sure ARIHE would not have survived without his leadership,” says former student and colleague Dr. Harry Fernhout, president of The King’s University College in Edmonton.

A short meditation by Hulst in December 2012 issue of *Perspectives* seems poignantly appropriate. Writing about the meaning of “Amen” (Q & A 129, Heidelberg Cat.), Hulst offered this summary: “‘Amen’ is not simply the end. It does mean that at the end of the year we can look back with gratitude and say, ‘God has been with us and blessed us.’ But it also means that at the beginning of the coming year we can count on God, knowing that his Word is sure and nothing can separate us from his love.”

Hulst is survived by his wife, Louise; three daughters, two sons-in law, grandchildren, a brother and a sister. A memorial service was held on Feb. 16 at Second Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa.

U.S.: Conscience fight over healthcare mandate continues



Dolan argues that Obamacare violates the consciences of Christian business owners.

(CNSNews) – New York’s Roman Catholic Cardinal Timothy Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued a statement earlier this month signaling to the Obama administration that the bishops will not make a separate deal to exempt Catholic institutions from an Obamacare mandate that requires health-care plans to cover sterilizations, contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs that leaves lay Catholic and other Christian business owners and individual employees still subject to the mandate.

Late last month, in response to ongoing criticism of the mandate, the White House issued a few changes that critics called “cosmetic,” but which still do not allow for Christians who own businesses to follow their consciences regarding the type of birth control their companies provide employees.

Dolan said, “In obedience to our Judeo-Christian heritage, we have consistently taught our people to live their lives during the week to reflect the same beliefs that

they proclaim on the Sabbath. We cannot now abandon them to be forced to violate their morally well-informed consciences.”

The cardinal said the bishops will also continue to support the many lawsuits against the regulation – including those brought by private businesses – that are moving forward in federal courts around the U.S.

The Catholic Association, a group of Catholic laypersons dedicated to advancing the principles of Catholicism, issued a statement supporting the bishops’ stand in defending the religious freedom of all Americans. “We stand with the bishops today in rejecting the proposed ‘accommodation’ which still violates the religious freedom of Americans,” said the group.

“The bishops have recognized in their statement that when the religious freedom of one is compromised, the religious freedom of everyone is compromised, whether they be their own affiliated institutions or non-Catholic institutions or for-profit employers,” said the association: We call on this administration to provide an acceptable exemption for people of faith, and to put an end to its anti-religious liberty policies.”

Stakes are high

Cardinal Dolan’s statement was specifically responding to a new version of the Obamacare regulation that the Department of Health and Human Services proposed in January. It would slightly modify how Obamacare defines the “religious” institutions that can be exempted from the sterilization-contraceptive-abortifacient

mandate. However, the proposed new version of the regulation would still force Catholic and other Christian-run non-profits (such as hospitals, charities and colleges) to buy healthcare plans from insurance carriers that, in turn, would be required to set up theoretically cost-free separate policies to provide free sterilizations, contraceptives and abortifacients to all beneficiaries. Further, the new proposal would provide no relief at all to individual Christians, whether they own a business or are employees.

The bishops explained that the HHS mandate creates a class of people without conscience protection at all: “individuals who, in their daily lives, strive constantly to act in accordance with their faith and

moral values. . . . Because the stakes are so high, we will not cease from our effort to assure that healthcare for all does not mean freedom for few.”

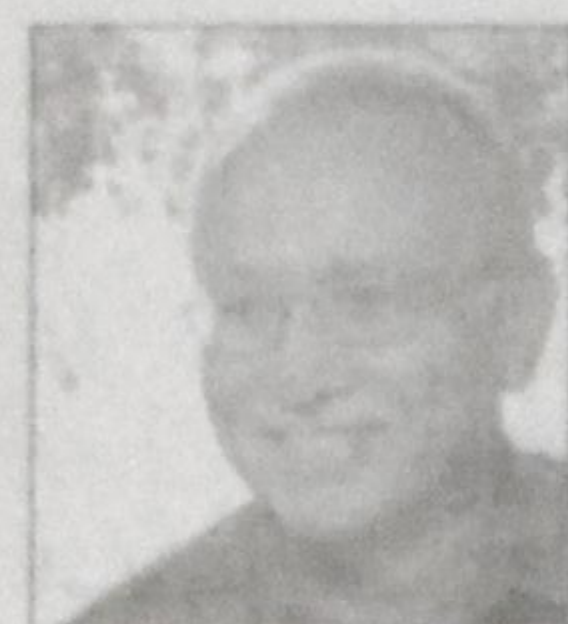
In an analysis published last August, the National Catholic Bioethics Center said that in keeping with Catholic moral teaching all Catholic business owners should drop health insurance coverage for all of their employees by no later than next January if the sterilization-contraception-abortifacient mandate is not lifted. Last year, when the initial regulation was finalized, many of the nation’s Catholic bishops wrote letters to their congregations, declaring: “We cannot – we will not – comply with this unjust law.”



News

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



You may not know me unless you've read *The Book of the Dun Cow*, by Walter Wangerin. My name is John Wesley Weasel and I'm here to tell you that I've had about enough of the slander you humans spread about my species. Except for Mr. Wangerin, just about every author I've

read pictures us as undesirable. Paul Zindel describes one of his characters as looking like a "constipated weasel." I ask you, would you like to be described that way?

Dictionaries define a "weasel word" as *an equivocal word used to deprive a statement of its force or to evade a direct commitment*. Then they explain that this arises "from the weasel's habit of sucking the contents out of an egg without breaking the shell." Pure slander, I say. Besides, when we do eat an egg, we make a hole in it; that would constitute breaking the shell, which shows how stupid as well as slanderous dictionary writers can be.



Even artists and rock singers like Frank Zappa have vilified us.

Slander in literature is one thing, but in conversation we hear all sorts of horrible things about our species. We're supposed to be fierce enough to attack (and defeat) much larger animals, like foxes. Alas, the truth is that pampered house cats and pet dogs kill many of us. We are just too small to go after such giants and do much more than cause a ripped ear or sharp nip to the nose. Before dying.

When it comes to chickens, the stories really get weird. Supposedly, we target chicken coops and kill whole flocks of them. I must admit that our cousins – mink and martens, especially – have been known to lose control in chicken coops, but do we blame all humans for the fact that some of the human family start wars?

Weasel wanted

One guy in Quick, B.C. – the guy who interviewed me for this column and transcribed it – actually made brush piles near his henhouse to attract birds, mice, snakes and us weasels. He thought that maybe we'd catch the mice and voles that hang out around the garden and under the henhouse. We did a little better than that. About every two or three weeks in winter, I make a trip to that brushpile and rid the underside of the coop of mice.

But then I discovered a couple other buildings. There's one where he stores grain and sometimes forgets about it. I had a feast there – and I'm not a vegetarian. I go through his old garage and even the new one attached to the house. What a hunting territory: there's a woodpile there, and a door that doesn't quite shut so deer mice are constantly sneaking in.

I suppose you could complain that I'm a thief because occasionally I take a pellet or two of dog food from right under the nose of ageing Chester, the Wonder Dog. Fortunately, for me and my cousins, the least weasels, this human no longer has an "outside cat." Otherwise, we might ourselves become prey.

In the Middle Ages things were even worse. Although we adorned the robes of nobles and kings, the lies about us were almost beyond belief. A medieval bestiary says this about us: *The weasel is a dirty animal that must not be eaten. It conceives at the mouth and gives birth through the ear (though some say it is the other way around). If the birth takes place through the right ear, the offspring will be male; if it is through the left ear, a female will be born.* Right.

We were also used in medieval allegory to represent the following: *people who willing hear the seed of the divine*

'Stop species profiling,' demands J.W. Weasel

word, but then do nothing with what they have heard. "Read the Book," I say.

Weasel convention?

So there you have it. People have vilified us from the beginning. Here's my question. People suspect they will have to learn to adjust to urban foxes, coyotes and raccoons. Maybe we'll come to the cities of North America or Europe too. I would love to hold a weasel convention in New York. No food or lodging required. Within a month we'd cause massive layoffs in the rodent extermination business. Would you rather have one cute weasel (check out the photo of me) running around the apartment block or mice and rats, traps and poisons – which never quite work. Oh, and we eat cockroaches (and henroaches) as a snack.

So do me a favour: change your thinking. As the Germans

say (our species lives there, too, and some of us speak the lingo):

Ändere dein denken – und du Änderst dein Leben.

Give us a break: stop the slander. A little appreciation, please.

Curt Gesch knows the guest author of this column. He (the guest) has eyes that glow green in the night. (The original German is this: *Das Leben ist so Einfach/ und schön – / Ändere dein denken – und du Änderst dein Leben.* "Life is so simple and beautiful; change your thinking and your life will change.")



Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



To live in this world, you must be able to do three things: to love what is mortal; to hold it against your bones knowing your own life depends on it; and, when the time comes to let it go, to let it go. – Mary Oliver

It's not that we don't love each other. We do. Very much.

Just not with the passionate, college kind of love. The kind of love that makes magic-marker cards and skips over sidewalk cracks and stays up until two a.m. kissing.

It's more of a laundry kind of love. You know, he does the laundry for me and I fall head over heels, because apparently the way to win my heart is through a box of detergent.

It's the kind of love that makes meals and bathes kids and fills up the bird feeder and takes out the garbage.

But I want the other love back. (I say this with a yawn as I fall into bed at 11 and barely read a page before falling asleep even as Trent's leaning in.)

I do. I want it. I'm just so tired. And he is too, and isn't every parent? So how do we do it? How do we keep the romance real while cleaning up poop and mending "owies" and doing dishes? How do we make out when we can't even find time to make eye contact?

We let it go. We let the children, the house, even the laundry go, so we can find ourselves again.

Because there's nothing more tragic than letting good love go to waste.

So we're leaning into what is mortal – each other – and we're holding it against our bones in the raw-tipped mountains while relatives watch our children, and we're sleeping in the curl of each other's arms and finding lips and playing cards and talking about something other than the kids (while watching videos of them on the camera because we miss them).

And Mary Oliver is right. Our lives depend on this. On this scaffolding that is marriage that our family is built upon, and we need these mountain moments to

The laundry kind of love

remember, it's more than a laundry kind of love. It's forever, baby.

Being made perfect

He's always saved me, in his own quiet, Christ-like way.

"I don't ever want our house to be without children," I told Trent last year. "Even when we're old, so long as we have beds, we have children," and Trent nods and he smiles.

But just hours earlier I'd been the one on the phone, calling our foster sons' mom, leaving a message saying we couldn't do it anymore. Weeping into the receiver saying it was causing too much stress and I couldn't see the light.

Then Trent called her back, while I was in the shower, saying, "Don't worry, Emily didn't mean that; she's just feeling sad. I know she still wants to take care of your children. Just give her time."

And after I got out of the shower, and

Trent prayed for me, I called her back. And left another message, not knowing he already had, saying, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean what I said. I was just stressed. Please forgive me. We are more than happy to take care of your children."

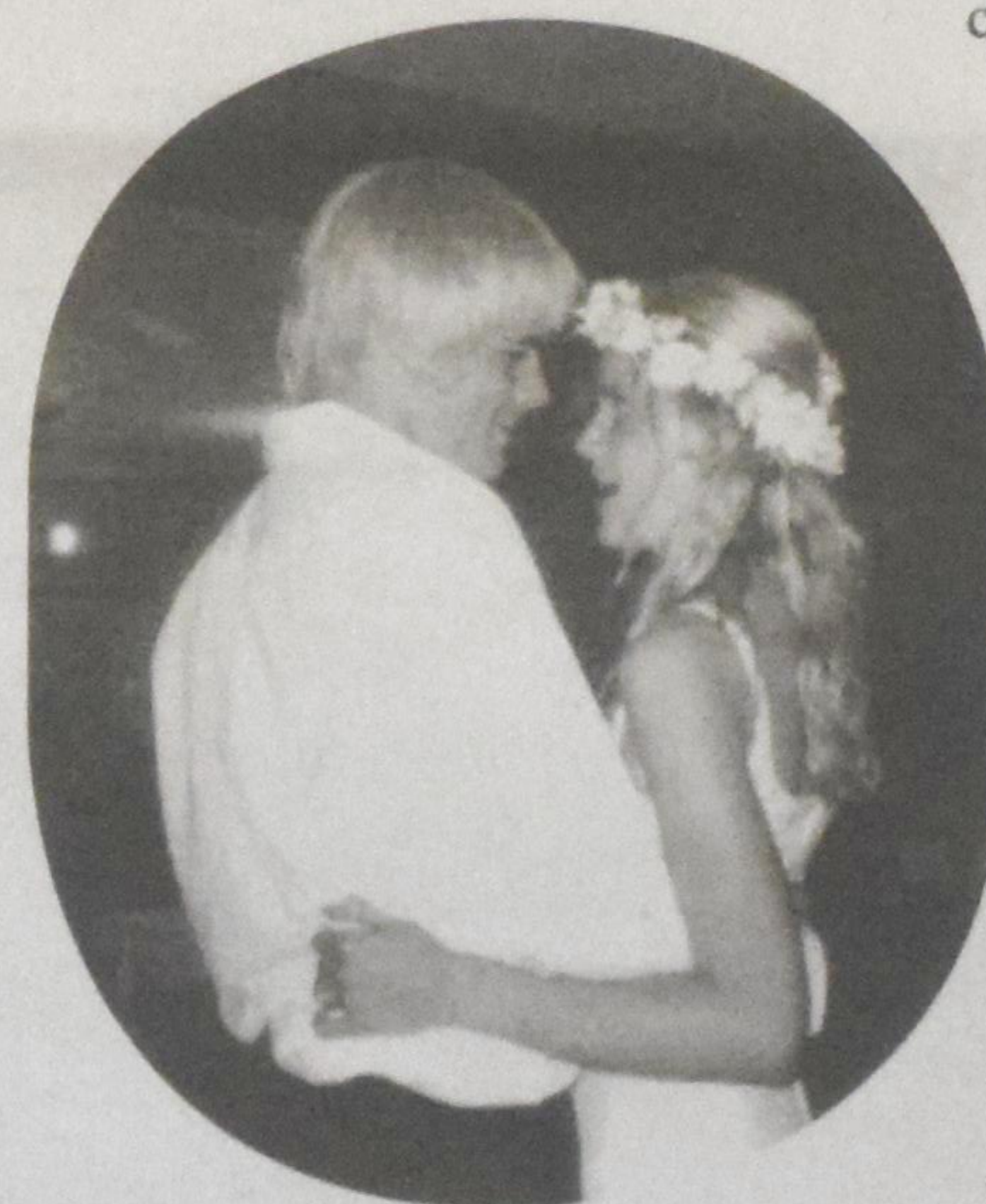
And I can still smell my mother's flowers, from where we stood under that trellis in my parent's backyard and said "For better or for worse, till death. . . ."

And he didn't know that meant three years of anorexia. He didn't know how close I'd come to death. He didn't know I'd change my mind after getting married about wanting children. All he knew was forgiveness.

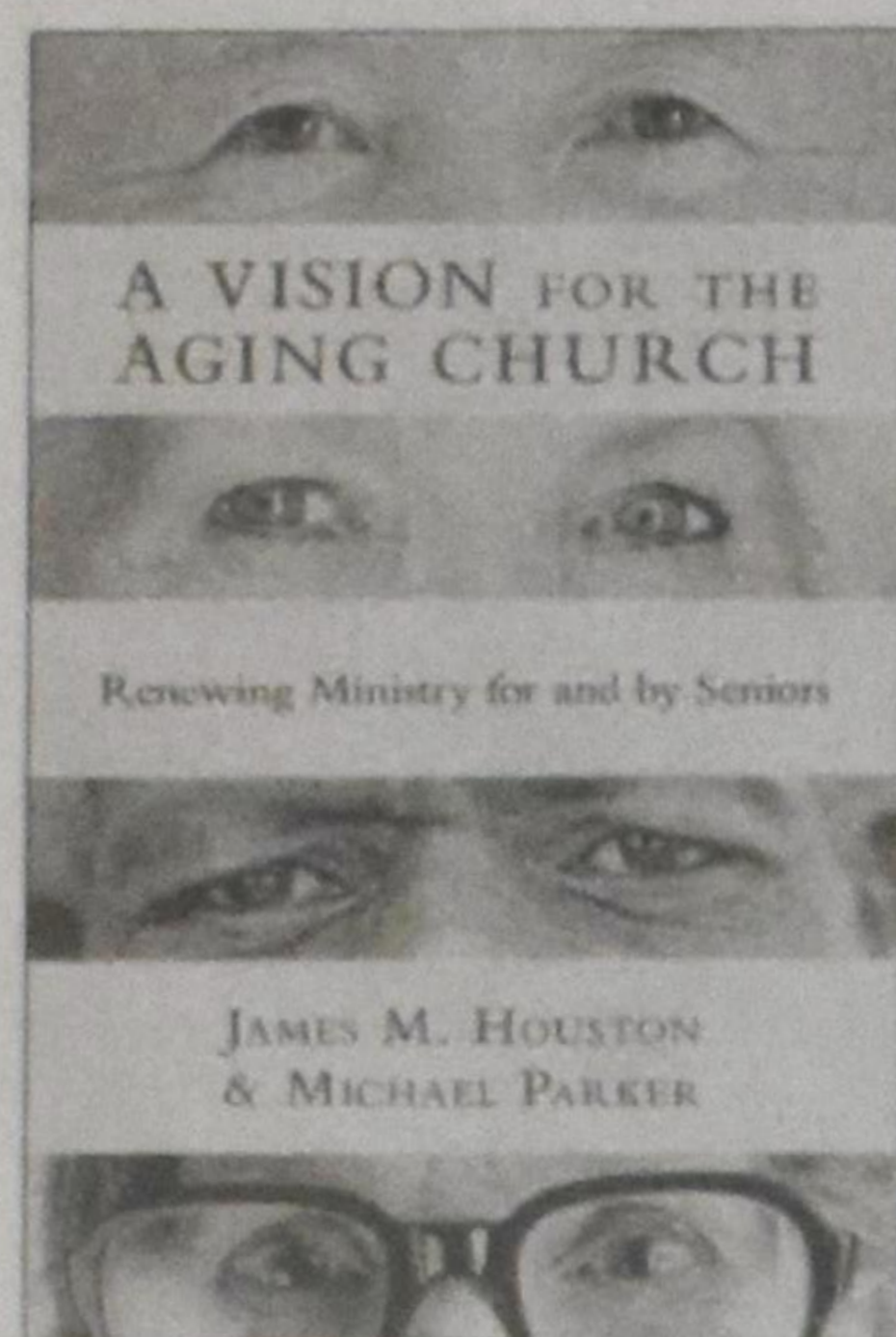
It's not been perfect. Trent's not perfect. I'm most certainly not, as my poor cooking attests to, but our lives are being made perfect with every kiss goodnight, with every child we make, with every child we help, with every prayer we utter together. It's the hardest, and most holy, of offerings. And so, I do, I do, I do.

Till death do us part. ➤

Emily Wierenga is the author of *Chasing Silhouettes*, and of *Mom in the Mirror: Body Image, Beauty and Life After Pregnancy* (coming Mother's Day, 2013). For more info, please visit emilywierenga.com.



Reviews



A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors

James M. Houston and Michael Parker, IVP Academic, 2011, 280 p.

There is gratitude for all who touched and enriched one's life with love. There is more inner peace as we approach the light, the feast, the supper of the Lamb.

Henri Nouwen, the deeply sensitive Catholic priest, called old age the fulfillment of life. Paul Tournier, a wise Swiss doctor of the person, saw opportunity for personal growth as the meaning of old age. How does your church see its old: as weak and frail needing support, or as a valuable resource for ministry, a gift of God?

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will bear fruit in old age" (Psalm 92). Does your church harvest the fruit of old age?

Unshelve the living curriculum

Houston and Parker have a message for the church: "stop squandering your seniors!" Too many churches have ministries *to* and *for* seniors but not *by* seniors. Secular society does not value its unproductive members; seniors are shelved, put aside. That should not happen in church. Sadly, this study concludes, churches, too, push their seniors to the back of the bus. The book offers suggestions to mobilize elderly members for service and ministry.

For example, seniors, like the elders of old, should focus on story telling. The younger generation needs to know through personal accounts what God has done in the life of the grey hairs. Their life is a living curriculum, exemplifying Christian faith and wisdom. Their stories make knowledge of God more direct and personal. The elderly can show the younger how to prepare for old age. Seniors might be interviewed to preserve an oral family history. A useful appendix lists helpful questions.

There is more; seniors are uniquely qualified to meet the loneliness of other seniors, to comfort the grieving, to support victims of family breakdown, to foster community and to counter contemporary society's growing sense of personal alienation. Faith, the book contends, is all about relationships. Given our culture, care-giving is faith's greatest test of character. In today's world the vitality of the church's witness demands that seniors be enlisted in types of ministry the elderly are particularly gifted for.

Intentional mobilization of seniors in church ministry is beneficial for the elderly themselves. Increasingly people live longer and are blessed with good health for years following retirement. Their need is to be useful, to broaden social contacts, to deepen personal relationships, to keep growing as persons. Some see no reason to get up in the morning, others are very busy, but busy with what – empty self-indulgence or meaningful service? Including seniors in church ministry can be a blessing for both congregation and seniors.

Some elderly have lost mobility, or eye sight, or hearing. They feel useless. The body of Christ has no useless appendixes! All have talent! It might be prayer, regularly telephoning a lonely person, befriending a prisoner by correspondence, knitting for third-world needs, all done in the name of Jesus and as service to him.

The authors also question the wisdom of age-specific ministries. Nearly all churches have Sunday school and adult education classes segregated by age, but why? Would inter-generational contact not be beneficial to age groups at both ends? Modern communication tools deprive the generations of face to face contact. The church can offer a fresh model focused on personal interaction to benefit both young and old.

The book is an eye-opener, offering new ways of empowering laity for ministry. Some seniors in each congregation should read it, apply it to their congregation and then push down the barriers! ➤

Nick Loenen is a West coast senior with a body beyond its best-before-date, but a mind still curious.



Stop squandering your seniors

Nick Loenen

All of life is a gift of God; old age is part of life; therefore old age is a gift of God. Do you think of old age as a gift of God? Does the church see seniors as a gift?

We idolize youth. That is where the future is. Is there a place for the old? Old age is grey hair, wrinkles, weakness, a walker, wheelchair, boredom, loneliness, decline, decay and then the inevitable hole in the ground. Some gift!

Stop! Death is not only a hole, but also a door. So too, old age is both less and more; less activity of the body but a deeper life of the spirit. "Though this outer man of ours may be falling into decay, the inner man is renewed day by day."

Old age enlarges the interests of the soul and mind. There is less independence and self-reliance, more surrender to God. Less anxiety, more trust, less self-righteousness, more acceptance of our own incompleteness and life's disappointments.



Faith is all about relationships.

Nuggets of wisdom in parenting book

Roxanne Van Farowe

If you are sick of reading parenting books, you shouldn't read this. Because it most definitely is a parenting book, a series of essays mostly by well-publicized Christian speakers, answering the question "What's the best parenting advice you ever got?"

Yawn . . . maybe. Yet there is a lot of good stuff here. I recommend reading it on the toilet. But have a pen and notepad handy in case you read something that you want to remember.

Here's a sampling of the notes I wrote (no, I don't take my own advice – I wasn't on the toilet):

"Parenting is a character profession" [as with a pastor: although we know they are human, there are certain expectations we have for a pastor's character].

"Instead of comparing your child to others, enjoy him."

"Parent as a team."

"Love is more powerful than anger."

"Parenting is about leadership."

"Engage in faith-talk with your children anytime and all the time."

"Go to the Bible instead of psychology."

"Spend 80 percent of your time being a spouse, not a father or mother."

Most of those are things you already know, right? That's why this is good toilet reading – anecdotes, new perspectives, a few practical pointers.

For example, Tim and Dary Kimmel, authors of *Grace Based Parenting*, recommend having a "What's Your Beef" night once a month, at least when kids are younger. This involves having a special dinner that kids can choose, and then a time where kids can share any ways that their parents have hurt them. The parents are supposed to listen, not make any explanation or rebuttal, just apologize for hurting the child. The "What's Your Beef" night is supposed to open channels of communication and trust with the child.

Another interesting perspective: author Shaunti Feldhahn was interviewing teens for a book she was writing, when she discovered again and again that when kids "felt that they had received anger, discipline or consequences without both a specific reassurance of love . . . they began to feel that their parents' love was conditional." One 16-year-old girl said "I need my mom or dad to listen and stand beside me rather than making it clear I'm not good enough for them." Feldhaun knew the girl's parents were "a loving Christian couple who adored their daughter." Feldhaun became convinced that parents must reassure their kids of their love as they discipline them to avoid a tragic misunderstanding.

Marriage matters most

But the last two notes from my list above came from an essay tucked near the end of the book, one that took me completely by surprise.

The essay, by John Rosemond, lives up to its lofty title: "The Truth Concerning Children – and the Truth Concerning Marriage." A family psychologist himself, Rosemond writes that he raised his first child to be a three-year-old brat based on the advice he had learned in psychology, that "for a child to be emotionally healthy, the family had to be child-centered." Upon the birth of their second child, he and his wife vowed that this new child would not be the centre of their lives but would instead adapt to them. And when that happened, his parenting philosophy did a 180.

Rosemond explains why today's parents are stressed out, angry, and/or worried: "Overwhelmingly, today's parents occupy their role as father or mother 80 to 90 percent of the time," Rosemond writes. He later continues "kids in a child-centered family are fine with the arrangement because they have power, and power is intoxicating. Have you ever noticed that intoxicated people think that they're happy when it's perfectly obvious to everyone else that they aren't?" He concludes that when parents focus on the husband-wife role 80 percent of the time, kids tend to be obedient and secure.

This essay stands head and shoulders above the rest in the book. In fact, the reason a parenting book like this sells is probably that so many parents are putting their children before their spouse – endlessly puzzling over how to solve their problems with their kids when they could be enjoying their marriage.

So if you read this book, I recommend you start with Rosemond's essay – a practical and convincing read. And maybe if you put it into practice, the rest will fall into place and you can just leave the book by the toilet. Until your one-year-old drops it in the bathtub. ➤

Roxanne Van Farowe and her husband Jim are raising five children in Durham, North Carolina.



Kids in a child-centered family have power but not security.

Features

Megachurch megaboom: Beyond the stereotypes

A reformed phenomena?

Peter Schuurman

The term “megachurch” is recent but large gatherings of the faithful are not. Jesus taught five thousand people before he fed them, and thousands were added to the church in a day in the book of Acts. Since then large communities of Christians dot the history of our faith: cathedrals were built to shelter thousands for the liturgy; evangelist George Whitefield brought the crowds to outdoor revivals; and preacher Charles Spurgeon and the infamous Aimee Semple McPherson gathered thousands in their city temples.

That said, we are now witnessing an explosion of megachurches (defined as Protestant churches with over 2000 attendees weekly). Management guru Peter Drucker has argued that megachurches “are surely the most important social phenomenon in American society in the last 30 years.” Scott Thumma and Dave Travis in *Megachurch Myths* (2007) report only 10 megachurches in 1900. In 1980 there were 15 times as many and by 2005 they report 1,210 (an increase from 0.13 to 4.0 per million Americans). In 2011 they reported 1,611 megachurches which they maintain gathers an astounding 10 percent of all those who attend church in the U.S.

Both numerically and as a percentage of the U.S. population, megachurches are becoming a more significant part of the cultural landscape, and their influence is exponentially greater. Megachurch pastor Bill Hybels’ Willow Creek Association claims 9000 churches on its list, and his colleague Rick Warren’s book *The Purpose Driven Life* has hit the palms of some 30 million people, not to mention his weekly email (“Rick’s Toolbox”) that goes out to 147,000 pastors world-wide. Megachurches have a mega-influence, and they have been springing up across the globe.

Why the sudden increase in such congregations? One religious writer claims they are “the evangelical answer to Home Depot,” suggesting that they are following cultural trends towards one-stop shopping box stores. These large retail outlets, however, are the products of post-suburban sprawl – edge cities built around highways, malls and the automobiles required to commute around them. Megachurches, with their multiple entry points, programs and website material, mirror the highly mobile and fragmented post-suburban lifestyle, and draw attendees not just locally, but regionally.

Management, marketing, and metrics

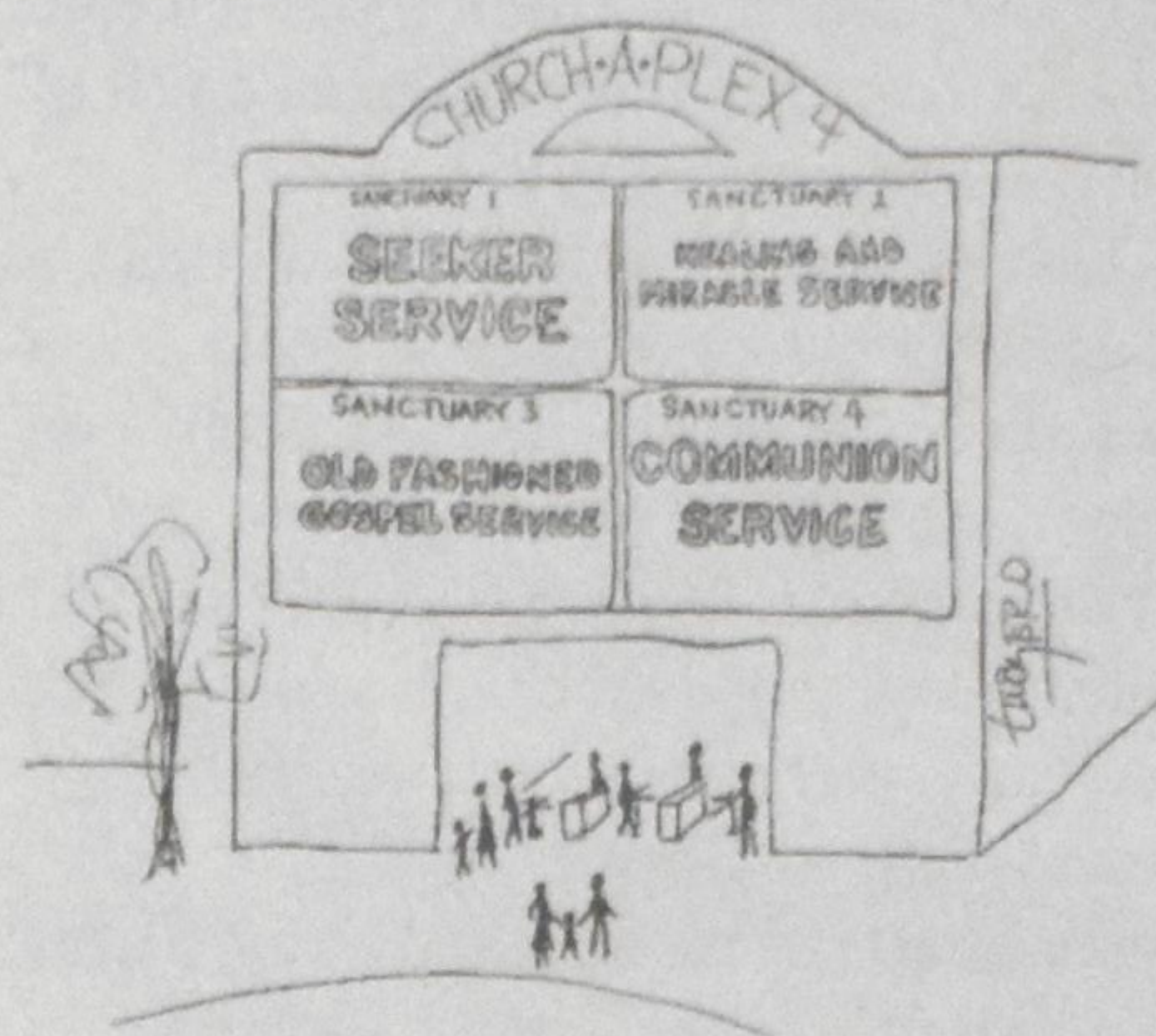
What some call contextualization others call compromise; the megachurch also has mega-critics. Religious studies professor Martin Marty has called them “an invention of the Age of Greed.” Writer Os Guin-

ness, in his critique *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts With Modernity* (1993) charges the megachurch with an unhealthy focus on management, metrics and methodology, which makes “evangelism infinitely easier but discipleship infinitely harder.” Deemed personality cults, religious marketing sell-outs, and therapeutic pop culture “havens of fun,” the megachurch draws some harsh scrutiny, and in many cases deservedly so. Some simply find the size and spectacle of the megachurch to be overwhelming: Calvin Seminary’s former professor Ruth Tucker wrote *Left Behind in a Megachurch World* (2006) in order to valorize the unsung faithfulness of the smaller church that may never grow big.

One needs to be careful, however, of stereotyping the megachurch; except for matters of scale, they are almost as varied as other congregations. The book *Megachurch Myths* narrows megachurches down to four ideal types: 30 percent fall into the category of Old Line/Program-based churches, like President Obama’s former church, Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago; another 30 percent of megachurches are “seeker” churches, like Bill Hybels’ Willow Creek; 25 percent of megachurches are Charismatic and/or pastor-focused, and like Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church, can be quite diverse; finally, the most recent type, founded since 1990, are categorized as New Wave or Re-envisioned churches, of which Rob Bell’s Mars Hill Church would be a prime example.

Surprising to some, an argument could be made that the Reformed tradition has been a central force in the development of the megachurch movement. A singular major influence in the last 40 years has been Reformed Church of America’s Robert Schuller and his Crystal Cathedral in California, with their television show, conferences and multiple other church growth resources. Just recently having failed at family succession, the Crystal Cathedral has historically been the sunny megachurch exemplar extraordinaire. Schuller claims having influenced, among others, such second-generation megachurch pastors as Rick Warren and Bill Hybels (who was himself a born and bred Reformed covenant child). The Christian Reformed Church has seen these men as pioneers of postmodern forms of church and has been sending congregational leaders to their conferences for decades.

Calvinist megachurches maintain a high profile. To name a few, John Piper’s longstanding Bethlehem Baptist church in Minneapolis unapologetically preserves the legacy of Jonathan Edwards in America. John F. MacArthur has been preaching for decades at Sun Valley Community Church in California, with his radio show, Christian



college and over 150 books to his name. The hyper-masculine “reformissional” approach typifies Mark Driscoll’s command of his expanding empire of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. Tim Keller attracts five thousand New Yorkers to his kingdom theology at Redeemer Presbyterian. Even the Christian Reformed Church, although at a lower profile, has two or three megachurches in its fellowship.

The Canadian mega

Canada, because of its smaller population and thinner population density, has fewer megachurches. The largest may be Springs Church, Winnipeg, with a reported 9,000 people. The second largest may be The Meeting House, with about 5,500 in southern Ontario. There may be as many as 10 other megachurches in Canada, but reliable attendance statistics are hard to come by.

I have been attending The Meeting House for about a year as the focus of my graduate research in religious studies. To demonstrate the rich diversity of megachurches, consider that this church is a member of the Anabaptist Brethren in Christ denomination, and it preaches the simplicity, pacifism and communitarian ethic that mark their tradition. “Pop culture is the door of our church,” said one leader to me when I asked about the extensive marketing staff and budget, “but the living room is intensive Christian discipleship.”

The celebrity preacher, Bruxy Cavey, is anything but the CEO of the church: he knows little about day-to-day operations in his church, but delegates management to the lesser-known Senior Pastor Tim Day (a former associate pastor at Maranatha CRC, Belleville. Christa Hesselink, their leadership development director, is also another former CRC church leader).

Like a growing number of megachurches, their many members do not all gather in one particular church building. They are “one church, many locations” and rent out 14 movie theatres across the GTA, where they show a DVD of the previous week’s teaching from the Oakville warehouse headquarters. While most of their resources are focused on Sunday’s teaching service, their ecclesiology focuses on their

175 “Home Churches” that meet during the week. Sunday is just a program, they say. Home Church is the “real” church. The bigger the church gets, it’s said, the smaller its focus becomes.

For those wondering about money at The Meeting House, their pastor’s salaries are relatively modest and 17 percent of the church budget goes towards local and global “compassion” – including a large commitment to the Mennonite Central Committee’s development work in southern Africa.

Beyond the scandalous image

The scandals of megachurch pastors are what make the headlines, but there is much more to the megachurch. One of their advantages is that they are inviting for those who would feel conspicuous in a smaller congregation or for those who wish to be anonymous for a season. They offer a wide variety of programs and have the resources to make monumental change in their community. Some contend that they are a stewardly use of both buildings and preachers – as few are needed for a larger number of people.

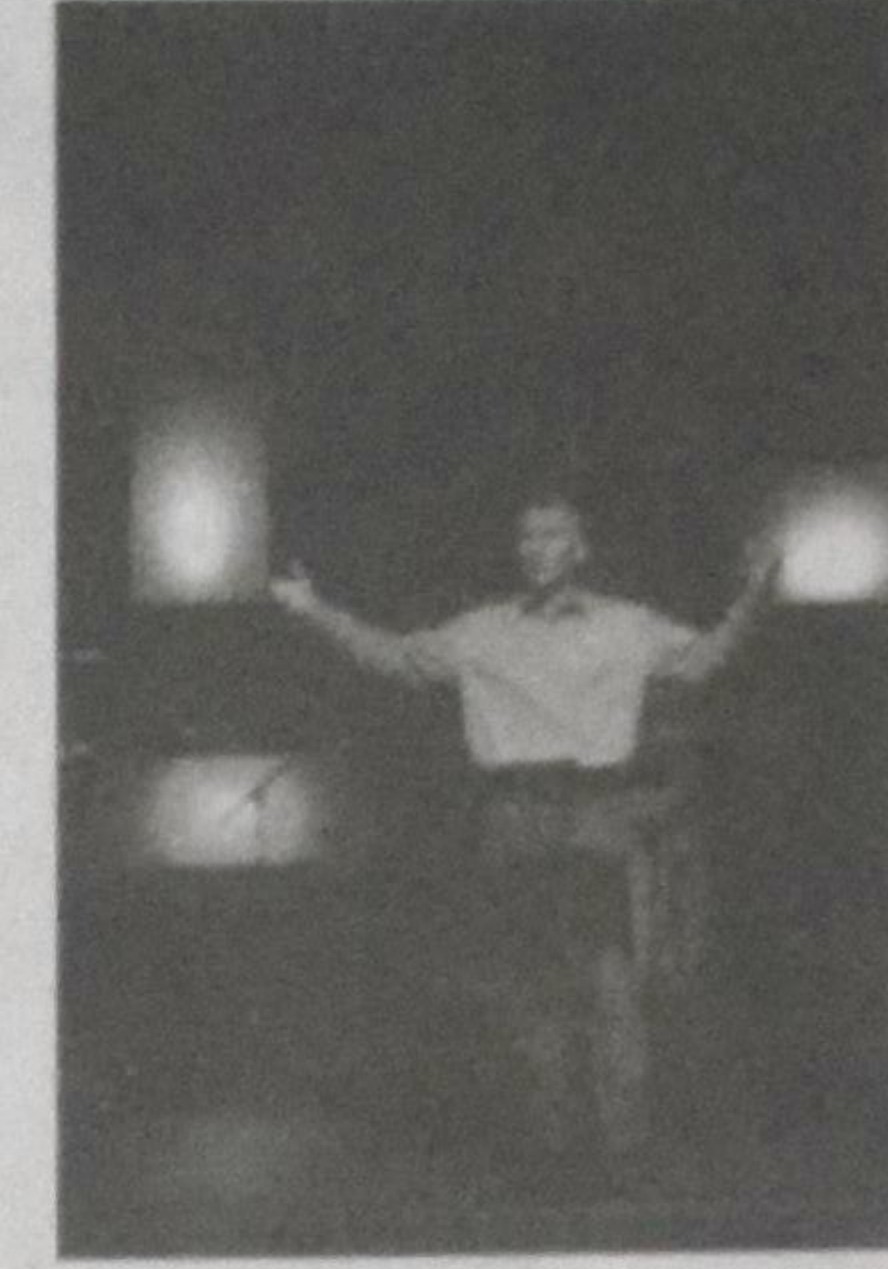
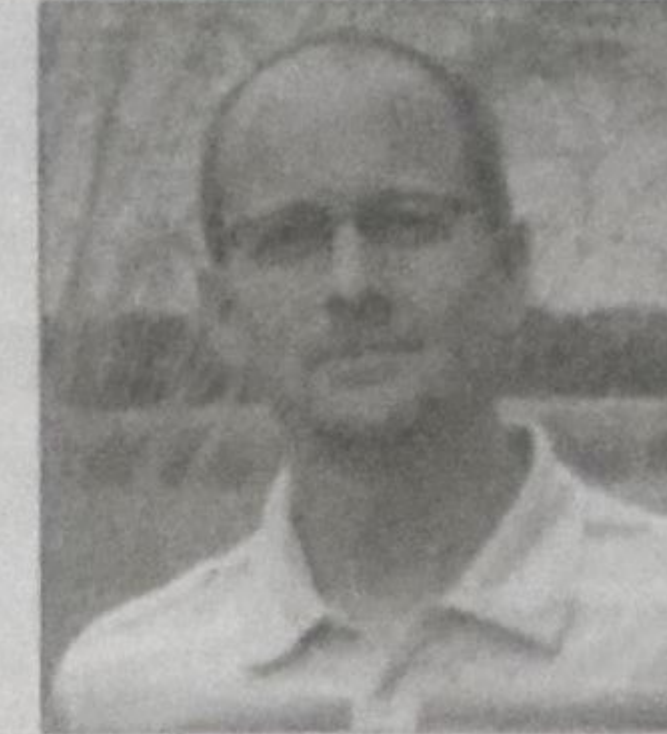
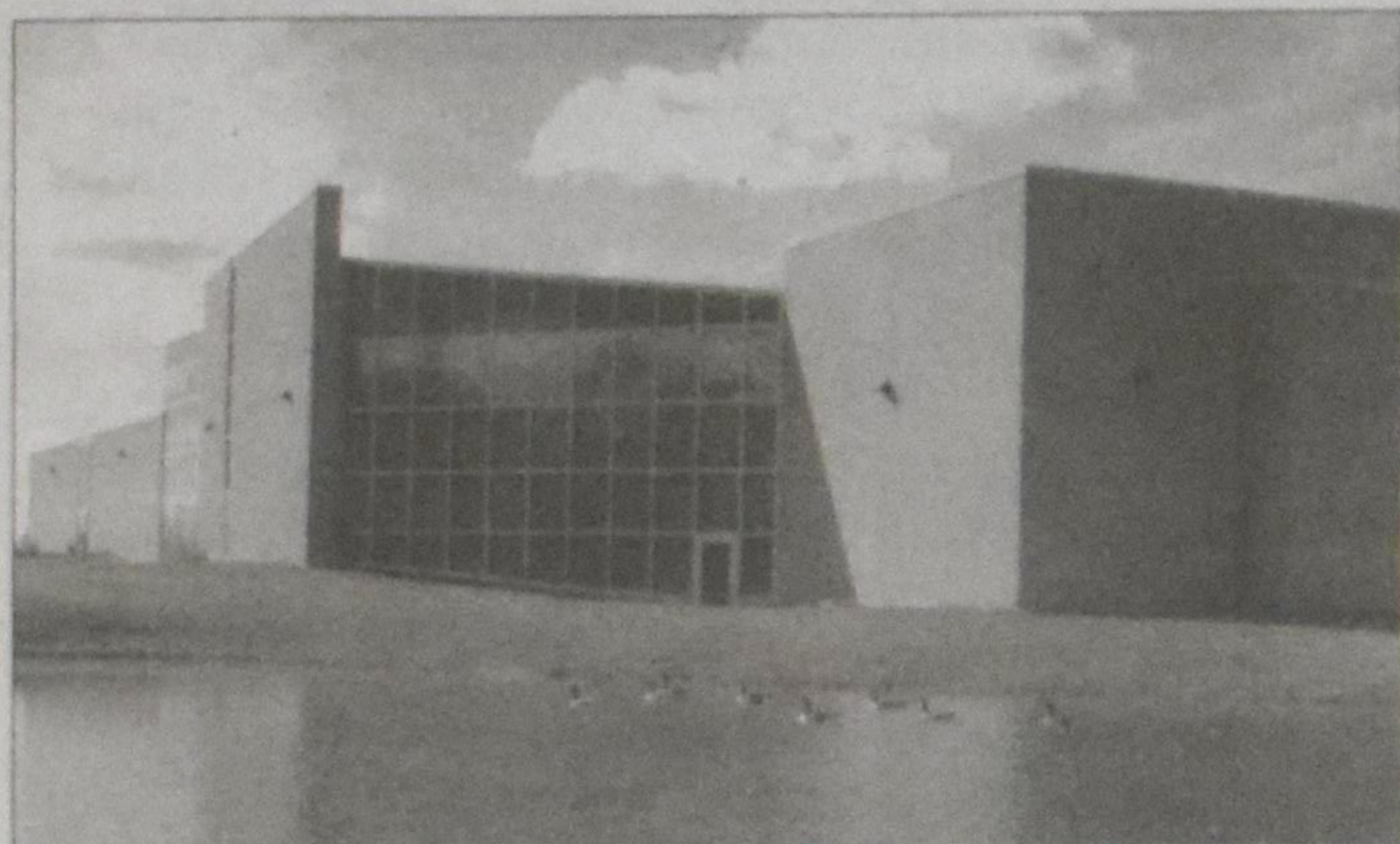
In a podcast on the megachurch phenomenon, sociologist and preacher Tony Campolo argues that there is one thing you cannot deny about the megachurch: it is an exciting, vibrant place to be, where the pastors are entrepreneurial, the music is powerful and the people are passionate about Jesus and sharing the gospel. Compared to boring, dying mainline churches, he contends, megachurches are community centres that bustle with joyful cultural and missional activity, not unlike the medieval cathedral in its day. He speculates whether some of the critiques are little more than put-downs, sour grapes and snobbery.

Many megachurches radiate a winsome enthusiasm for the Christian faith. That’s why people go. There is a playfulness with church, a purposefulness to ministry and a wide variety of places in which one can serve. As I’ve heard numerous times in my research: “This is the kind of church that I’m happy to invite my friends to.” I’m not about to switch over to a megachurch, but attending a megachurch for a season has softened the easy cynicism I otherwise absorb in the secular academy and mass media. The Spirit moves in the megachurch, too. Just don’t confuse the Spirit with noisy hype that promises more than it delivers.



Peter Schuurman is working on a PhD in Religious Studies at the University of Waterloo. His research focuses on the congregational life and context of The Meeting House.

Features



Exterior shot: Forest City Community Church, Sunday worship, Pastor Rob Hogendoorn, Associate pastor Ron Baker, Pastor Rob Hogendoorn preaches.

Forest City Community Church: driven by vision

Linda Jonasson

How did a church plant that started with 12 people bloom into a congregation of 2,500? That was the burning question as I drove to London one Sunday morning in January. I wound my way along Bostwick Drive, high-rises on my right and an open field on my left. I pulled into the Forest City Community Church (FCCC), one of a caravan of cars heading into the parking lot. It felt like I was going to a rock concert! Parking attendants holding pointers guided me to a spot. I headed into the building along with a mass of humanity. The sun blazed through the large windows at the front entrance. People bought coffee at the café and conversed at round tables. Others greeted people at the Welcome Centre. It was a flurry of activity, but purposeful.

I approached an usher named Phyllis, introduced myself and asked her how she came to FCCC. She said that five years ago she went through a divorce and was looking for a strong church community. She joined the singles' group. As we talked, another usher came up to us. She said they had been dating for a while. While she hadn't met him at Forest City, she did invite him to worship there. He returns each week, even when she can't attend.

Phyllis invited me to take a peek at the sanctuary while I waited for my brother and his wife, recent newcomers to Forest City. A year ago, Bill and Julie had no church. Although they'd been married seven years and had two young sons, Bill showed little interest in finding one. However, our family has experienced some real trials in recent years and he was hurting. That was when a co-worker invited him to Forest City. One service and he was hooked! His wife Julie notes: "It has fed me spiritually in many ways. Mostly though, it has helped me to get through difficult situations in my life. I always leave thinking about what the pastors said. They really do always leave me thinking and I find myself always wanting to make myself a better person."

After hearing these testimonials, I wanted to check out FCCC for myself. The service opened with a powerful song called "Move," belted out by a lead singer, four backup vocalists and a five-piece band. I thought, *I wish we had music like this at my church.* The congregation moved with

the music, already feeling the Holy Spirit. The response was natural, not forced. The band exited the stage and a young woman entered. She performed a skit about leading a purposeless existence, being invited to a church by a friend and finding meaning through Jesus.

The minister got up to preach: he had no pulpit, just a stand. But his message was powerful. How do we remain resilient in a world that keeps throwing us curve balls? How do we keep our faith? How do we run the race that God has set before us? He pointed out that it is not a race, but a marathon and that those valleys we run through can make us stronger if we lean on God. He used the analogy of the dimpled golf ball and how it travels further than a smooth one. After 20 minutes, the pastor ended the sermon. It left me wanting more; I was wishing I could be there next week for Resilience – Part II.

Driven to reach those far from God

Afterwards, my brother introduced me to the associate pastor, Ron Baker, who joined the church only two years after its formation. Pastor Ron's Aunt Rosemary and Uncle Paul were part of the original Christian Reformed launch. He said that it was the church's "laser sharp vision" that has made the church what it is today. The church is "driven to reach those who are far from God." While most churches attract people from other churches, Forest City's mission is to attract the non-churchgoer; half of their congregants were non-churchgoers when they arrived.

Later I phoned Rob Hogendoorn, the senior minister, and asked him if in his wildest dreams he had ever thought that FCCC would become a "megachurch." Without hesitation, he said "yes." He described those early days 19 years ago when their church plant consisted of cluster of 12 people meeting in a house. He would play the piano, then slide off the bench and collect his sermon notes to preach.

But he dreamed big and God blessed that dream. With the help of a few individuals, Pastor Rob called 11,000 people in South London asking if they would be open to answering a survey. One thousand said yes and the surveys were mailed out. Meeting

in an elementary school at this point, 170 people showed up that first Sunday. While they didn't all come back the next Sunday, many did. The word spread that something was happening at FCCC. People told their nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles, friends and co-workers. The growing congregation soon moved to a high school.

By 2005, only 12 years after the launch, the church had outgrown the high school and its members broke ground on Bostwick Road, a 30-acre site in London's southwest corner. Pastor Rob remembers the prayer service they held to dedicate the new church. Everyone wrote the name of a "lost" family member or friend on a stake, someone who had fallen away from God. The stakes were buried in the church's foundation. He says he will never forget that service. More construction followed at FCCC as they expanded in 2008 and again in 2012.

I asked Pastor Rob at what point he felt like FCCC had arrived, the point at which the plant had bloomed into a full-fledged tree. I thought he might say when they moved to their own building. But no, he said that FCCC still feels like a church plant today; they never feel like they have quite arrived. What a humble response from someone who heads a megachurch! Maybe Forest City's self-image is the secret to its success. Its members do not sit back on their laurels; they are always reaching out to the community, looking for new members, pushing the envelope. They never forget that laser-sharp vision which drives them forward, blessed by God, to bring the non-churchgoer to Christ.

Growth balanced with connectedness

While growth is good, how do they keep such a big church intimate? Pastor Rob explained that FCCC has three types of groups that enable newcomers to get to know others: Serving Teams (ushers, the music team, the drama team); Home Groups (small group Bible Studies) and Life Assistance groups (addiction programs, Alpha Course).

I mentioned to Pastor Ron how effort-

lessly the service flowed. He said the success of the service is thanks to the 80 to 120 volunteers who operate behind the scenes on any given Sunday. Many of these volunteers lead the Sunday School which has grown to 250 members. The children worship in their own sanctuary, and then split up into their individual classes. As Pastor Rob maintains, it is not enough to just come to church; getting involved makes you feel like you are part of the church community. The bulletin is full of opportunities to get involved, from Marriage Restoration to Starting Points for newcomers.

Pastor Ron admitted that FCCC might not be for everyone. There are no stained glass windows, no crosses, no symbols, no pews (they have cushioned chairs). The music is modern; they often play U2 songs or music by other rock groups. The attire is informal. But that unorthodox approach seems to be filling the seats.

Pastor Rob shared a story about the best part of his job. He recalled going out for dinner and meeting a London waitress who attends the University of Western Ontario. They started talking and she realized she recognized him from FCCC. It turned out that her grandparents had invited her there for a Christmas service (one of six which would include 4,500 worshippers). In the car ride to the church, the young woman thought her life was quite boring. However, after worshipping at Forest City, she was so excited she wanted to share her experience with others. She brought her mom the very next day.

And that is what Pastor Rob wants members and visitors to take away from the worship experience. He wants them to feel a profound sense that God is near, that the kingdom of God is at hand. He wants them, as ambassadors of the Saviour, to share that truth with the world.



Linda Jonasson is an elementary school teacher and writer. She lives with her family in Brantford, Ont. and attends Hope CRC. She blogs at alinefromlinda.blogspot.com.

Pastor Ron admitted that FCCC might not be for everyone... But [the] unorthodox approach seems to be filling the seats.

Features



Christian Courier is pleased to present this second article in a six-part series on First Nations topics. Our guest writers are author James C. Schaap and PhD candidate Seth Adema. James Schaap will focus primarily on the CRC's outreach efforts to the Zuni people in Rehoboth, N.M., while Seth Adema, who is studying aboriginal interactions with the Canadian criminal justice system, will focus on Canadian concerns. We encourage our readers to offer feedback either by way of a letter to the editor (editor@christiancourier.ca), comments online at christiancourier.ca or by tweeting us at twitter.com/ChrCourier.

The persistence of the 'educating settler'

Seth Adema

Conducting research on the historic relationship between the church and Aboriginal peoples in Canada, I found a pamphlet published by a missionary working with Aboriginal peoples in northern Ontario for a major denomination. The author argued that the fundamental role of the Christian missionary was to "clarify the thinking" of Native peoples. Implicit within this statement was the claim that Aboriginal peoples held within them not only the potential for conversion, but that the belief structure held by many Aboriginal peoples paralleled the Christian worldview to the extent that the role of the missionary was simply to explain how the theology of Jesus Christ completed their spiritual understandings. In this way, Aboriginal peoples were proto-Christians before they ever heard the gospel. All that remained, this pamphlet argued, was for the Euro-Canadian missionary to educate Native peoples. This mindset underlies the history of the relationship between Native peoples and Newcomers in the guise of church and state.

It is impossible to boil down what went wrong in the relationship between settlers in northern North America and the Aboriginal peoples who preceded them to one assumption, or even set of assumptions, but the attitudes implicit within this pamphlet illustrate some dynamics of the colonial relationship. A key error in this logic, and an assumption that persists today, is that Euro-Canadians held the answers to "problems" of their own definition. Throughout Canadian history, this mindset has had a negative impact on the relationship between First Nations and newcomer societies.

A Bible in one hand and a land surveying kit in the other

The first European settlers that colonized North America came with a Bible in one hand and a land surveying kit in the other. From an economic and military standpoint, the two sides met on largely equal terms, but intellectually Europeans considered themselves as a higher level of human evolution. The eighteenth century philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau borrowed ideas from Aristotle and famously argued that humanity developed along a set of evolutionary leaps. Aboriginal peoples, Rousseau argued, were "savages" as compared to the "civil men" of European societies. According to this logic, it was the task of the European to raise the Aboriginal peoples that settlers met to their level of development. Missionaries, especially Jesuits, took up this mantle in the earliest days.

In the nineteenth century the attitudes behind early contact were solidified within new bureaucratic structures. While governments were changing, expanding and consolidating roles held earlier by the church and earlier manifestations of the state, many of the key ideas remained the same. The Indian Act, originally signed in 1876 and revised numerous times, was imagined as a *temporary* measure until Aboriginal peoples in Canada were assimilated into Canadian society. According to the then-popular ideas of the "vanishing Indian," the Act would quickly become obsolete as no more Native peoples existed, at least at the cultural level. While treaty relationships dictated peaceful coexistence on the land, the Act determined that Aboriginal peoples were to become the same as Euro-Canadians

and was predicated upon antiquated logic. At the time, John A. Macdonald famously stated, "The great aim of our legislation is to do away with the tribal system, and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion." In this line of thinking, Aboriginal peoples only needed the Canadian government to lift them up. Nobody seemed overly interested in the fact that Native nations were not convinced that Europeans held the answers they sought.

Again in 1969 the Canadian government created a plan, once and for all, to solve the problems facing the Native peoples of Canada, and again the logic behind this plan originated in the time of Rousseau. Jean Chrétien, who was then the Minister of Indian Affairs for the Pierre Trudeau government, recommended the abolition of the Indian Act and the removal of the special rights of Native peoples in Canada. While the Indian Act was an oppressive piece of legislation, it did guarantee the Aboriginal peoples of Canada unique rights as encoded in treaties. In this act, the Canadian government proposed that the Native peoples of Canada lose all of their unique rights as Aboriginals. This was met with swift and unanimous opposition by Native organizations in Canada who accurately envisioned the policy proposal as another step in a long history of European governments attempting to diminish the place of Native peoples. Harold Cardinal, at the time the youthful leader of the Indian Association of Alberta, encapsulated opposition to the White Paper writing, "We would rather continue to live in bondage under the inequitable Indian Act than surrender our sacred rights." I have no doubt that many honest people were working behind this policy proposal, but those who proposed the abolition of the Indian Act did so without consulting Aboriginal elders and rooted their arguments in a political ideology that had no roots in Aboriginal worldviews. In other words, the recommendations were another example of the Canadian government

attempting to educate Aboriginal peoples on how to be "Canadian" rather than listening to what the First Nations had to contribute.

It is tempting to view these issues as strictly historical, and that surely today societies have moved past ideas first expressed by imperial philosophers, but sadly this is not always the case. Government decisions often ignore the distinct worldview of Native peoples in Canada. At a personal level, these attitudes exist within academic work when academics assume that their training within the fields of history, anthropology and so on give them authority to give the solutions to problems that still face many Native communities. Many Aboriginal peoples have grown so weary of outsiders assuming that they hold the keys to a brighter future that they quite reasonably have refused to participate any longer.

A time to be learners instead of teachers

Throughout history non-Native thought concerning First Nations peoples has had obvious and well-documented negative impacts on Native peoples, but the failed relationship influenced everyone involved. My personal experience has shown that entering relationship attempting to teach



Idle No More blocks the Blue Water Bridge in Sarnia, Ont.

rather than to learn from Aboriginal people misses an important point about the relationship: I have learned much from dialogue with Native peoples who have strengthened my own intellectual, personal and spiritual foundations. By entering relationship without a willingness to learn, all of Canadian society has become less vibrant as a result. Reconciling with Aboriginal peoples in Canada benefits all parties involved, and like it or not, we are all involved. As a Canadian of Dutch extraction, I have been blessed by relationships with a number of Aboriginal people who have been willing to share with me insight into life, faith and history. The church can do the same.

Churches in Canada need to go about reconciliation because for many years the assumptions that dictated Euro-Canadian thinking on Aboriginal peoples in Canada went unexamined at best. In order to reconcile, we need to recognize the sins of the past, even if our families or churches entered the scene after the Indian Act was signed into law and the Residential School system was established. By immigrating, settlers entered into relationships with Native Canadians. . . . The church played a disappointing role in the history of colonialism, and this is a history that churches today must confront through conversation with Native peoples. Recognizing the problems with our own past is a vital part of reconciliation.

The point I am making here has to do with not only the methods of reconciliation, but also the purpose. It is easy, coming from a family of recent migrants to North America/Turtle Island, to assume that the task of reconciliation does not land upon my plate. After all, the legacies facing Native peoples today began in the 1500s while my family history entered the scene following WWII. My church did not run any residential schools, and my family did not distribute smallpox-infested blankets. However, reconciliation is about mending broken relationships. It is about entering dialogue with humility and seeking understanding. The track record of given "solutions" is very poor. Perhaps we can learn from history.



Seth Adema is a PhD candidate in the department of history at Wilfred Laurier University.

Columns

Coming to God like a child

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til



Last month I wrote about prayer ("Lord, Teach Us How to Pray Aright"). I'm going to continue on that vast subject.

We've been told that when Jesus taught his followers to approach God as "Our Father . . .," he was using a term for God that is close, comfortable, familiar, not unlike our use of "Dad." The disciples were surely taken aback. What Jew had ever addressed the LORD Yahweh in that manner? It speaks profoundly of how Jesus expects us to relate to God.

It's no wonder, then, that Jesus also taught that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who approach him as children do. And that "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:14-15). That's astonishing! In fact, Jesus became *indignant*, says Mark, at the disciples' hindering of the children who were brought to him for a blessing. There is anger in indignation. Normally that's sin. But Jesus' righteous indignation should be heartening to all of us who aim to follow Jesus with childlike faith wherever he leads.

Jesus is implying: come to my Father, your Father, with intimate familiarity, in child-weakness; without guile, pretense or self-consciousness; wholly trusting that your needs – and even desires – will be satisfied. After Jesus rebuked his disciples he took those children into his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. Picture it! When in prayer we come as children to the God who has known us intimately from eternity, he, too, will "take us in his arms, place his hands on us and bless us."



William Cowper

The Reformed tradition is theologically careful about prayer (and all else). That's good. But over-emphasizing the intellect can adversely affect the way we pray: we must include the right things, avoid the wrong things, not ask for too much, not praise too little, reverence God. Indeed God is holy and wholly deserving of our awe. But just as a child's every-day talk with her dad still respects him as her father whom she obeys, so we can both reverence God and draw close to him as our Father and friend. Jesus took on our flesh and blood and died to make it possible.

'Come messy'

If we pray to God as our Father then we come as his weak, vulnerable children. When do you most feel God's intrinsic presence in prayer? I pray best – feel the stirring of the Spirit, God's intimate closeness – when I'm ill, weary, grieving, overwhelmed by some circumstance, or weighed with concern for myself, someone I love, the church, the world. That's no accident. At such times we are most "childlike"; we lay our defenseless selves bare before God and feel his welcoming heart. As Paul Miller says in his excellent book *A Praying Life: Connecting With God in a Distracting World*, "Jesus doesn't say, 'Come to me, all you who have learned how to concentrate in prayer, whose minds no longer wander, and I will give you rest.' No, Jesus opens his arms to his needy children and says, 'Come to Me, all who are weary and



"Jesus doesn't say, 'Come to me, all you who have learned to concentrate in prayer.'"

heavy-laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11:28). The criteria for coming to Jesus is weariness. Come overwhelmed with life. Come with your wandering mind. Come messy." And come without a mask, spiritual or otherwise. The real you has to meet the real God, *our Father*.

One of my favourite poets is the 18th century Calvinist Englishman William Cowper ("God Moves in a Mysterious Way"). Cowper (pronounced Cooper) struggled with paralyzing depression, doubts about his salvation, and four times had a mental breakdown. He was assumed insane and committed to an asylum. His poems reveal his struggling heart of hearts. It is precisely his coming back to God again and again in abject weakness that leaves such a powerful impression on fellow Christians more than two centuries later.

In Cowper's helplessness he saw himself as a child. In "A Figurative Description Of The Procedure Of Divine Love," he likens the Christian life to a sea journey fraught with fathomless depths and frightful storms, through which God as Love tries his courage (*Love, with power divine supplied, / Suddenly my courage tried*). In fact, God disappears, filling Cowper with terror. Cowper then thinks he must lean on his own devices. But instead, he *becomes as a child*; he cries out to God. He bends his own will to God's, making the profoundly difficult confession, "All is right that thou wilt do." Then something amazing happens:

*This was just what Love intended;
He was now no more offended;
Soon as I became a child,
Love returned to me and smiled:
Never strife shall more betide
'Twixt the bridegroom and his bride.*

In "Exhortation to Prayer" Cowper puts into practice that lesson learned. Oh, the comfort of drawing close to God *in our weakness* and feeling his blessed presence. Such childlike faith makes Satan tremble.

*Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;
Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.*

"Let the children come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of heaven." ➤

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, N.Y. She blogs at www.ReformedRevelry.wordpress.com.

ARTFUL EYE



Touch of Majesty, watercolour, Joe Veltman.

Symphony in White

Sometimes nature's displays lack restraint, tasteless excesses assaulting the senses. Spring flowers by the score seem to clamor for the perfumer's note, summer's many voices are bright enough to blind the ear, and, like Joseph, autumn puts on airs when God plays favourites with vivid hues.

Then these seasons
seem like creation's tuning
for the masterpiece to follow,
when the cacophony
is subdued
by bold movements
of His hand.

The Arctic winds still all
but the rustle of His passing.
The angels drape their robes
on the heights, and the mountains rise
to declare the purity of His being;
and the evergreens make brittle incense
to His everlasting love.

Now there comes an interlude of rest,
a crescendo of quiet,
a vision of calm,
a scent of glory,
and a final touch
of majesty.

Joe Veltman



Joe Veltman is the pastor at Calvary Community Church, New Berlin, Wis. He enjoys painting, photography and writing poetry.

Columns

God's faithfulness to this father

Tom Deelstra

My first days as a father did not go very well. It all started when I left my wife in the delivery room to get a cup of coffee. As I brought back my Tim's, Melissa was no longer smiling and joking with the midwife; she was now doubled over the bed in agony. Pre-natal classes did not prepare me for that moment. Things got worse when I nearly fainted before Hannah was born and was forced by two little midwives to sit down and put my head between my legs. I was able to get my act together in time for Hannah's birth, but watching my naked, slimy and screaming child sent me right back down. I thought babies came out pink, round and smiling. Television did not prepare me for that moment.

Later, left alone, tired and exhausted with our newborn, it was my responsibility to take care of Hannah while Melissa slept. Within five minutes I found the hospital nursery. As I dropped my child off, I noticed there were no other babies there. If I was not so tired, I might have felt guilty. Back in our room alone, Melissa and I looked at each other as if to say, "What have we done?" and then we fell asleep.

My parents arrived later that day. My mom is a baby expert. Within minutes of ar-

iving, my mom informed me, "Tom, she's allowed to wear clothes." I honestly had not thought past the perfectly swaddled blanket that the midwives had expertly put her in. Mom pulled out multiple matching outfits and lovingly dressed my poor naked baby.

As we left the hospital to take Hannah home, I felt so proud carrying Hannah through the halls in her car seat. Hauling heavy things and then driving them around was something I knew I could do well; after all, I had grown up on a farm. My jubilation was short lived, however, when halfway home Mom told me I could drive more than 30km/h.

New joys

I have learned a few things since those early days. Faith, time and trust are principles that have helped me to (slowly) become the father God created me to be.

Faith has helped guide my journey into fatherhood, but it hasn't been so much my faith in God, as God's faithfulness to me. Despite seven moves (one across the world) in the last three years, God has been gracious and these moves have brought us closer together as a family. God's given me patience as I've cradled, driven and walked a colicky baby. God's given Han-

nah patience as she's waited on a Dad who hasn't completely figured out the whole parenthood thing yet. God's also given us plenty to be thankful about. As Hannah and I cuddle on a Saturday morning in a warm house, with my coffee on the end-table and the snow falling outside, I can't help but smile and hold Hannah a little tighter as I reflect on his many blessings.

Time and trust have helped Hannah and I find our rhythm. While my profession is a busy one, I have had many opportunities to spend quality time with Hannah. I have learned that Hannah likes going on drives and running errands with her Daddy (although she does not like going on dates; she always makes sure there is an extra seat at the Tim's table for when Mommy comes). Hannah has always liked to play and I delight every time I see her learn something new.

Time spent together has led to a deep sense of trust between Hannah and me. While I still panic whenever I see Hannah do something reckless – just yesterday she tried climbing over our superyard fence and almost landed on her face – I trust that she will make good decisions based on the things Melissa and I have taught her. In turn, she trusts that I will never drop her

when we are playing, and that we will look after and take care of her, even when our life gets stressful. I know that an almost three year old would have trouble articulating this, but after all the moves, and living in a troubled third-world country, she's become responsive to our ministrations.

In many ways, my journey into fatherhood is just beginning. In August I will become a father for the second time (*D.V.*). This promises new challenges, but inside of God's faithfulness, new joys as well. And while I'm not a perfect Dad yet, a conversation between my daughter and her friend sure made me feel like I've made it. While playing pretend kitchen together, Hannah looked over at her friend and said, completely unrelated to the conversation "My daddy's huge." And then she went on playing.



Tom Deelstra (tmdeelstra@gmail.com) is the eighth grade teacher at Chatham Christian School.

For God's glory, our comfort and the edification of the church

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



The day our grandson was baptized was crystal-line. Everything shone, God's beneficence polishing every moment. Those days don't happen often enough; probably that says more about my clouded

sight and dim soul than about God.

It was snowing heavily as Mark and I drove up to the First CRC in Barrie. This charming rustic church is thoughtfully nestled into the surrounding trees. The hush of a myriad flakes falling thickly in the subdued grey light created an intimate sense of enclosure, a holy circle in the city.

Our son Tom and daughter-in-law Sarah were in the mothers' room. Baby Jake had just finished nursing. He was quietly content, his bright eyes taking everything in with glorious innocence and incomprehension. Tom dressed him in his baptismal gown, the same gown sent from Holland by my grandmother to my mother in Canada for my baptism, a garment now 58 years old. I thought about that aching distance as I carefully washed and ironed it. The yearning with which my grandmother must have wrapped the delicate gown; the long-

ing with which my mother must have received the special package. Tom had been baptized in this gown, too. I watched as he gently eased his son's rosy arms through the sleeves. Sarah cuddled the baby close to her heart as Tom did up the buttons at the back. An inner voice, maybe my own, whispered, *Mark these moments – talismans against those "other" days.*

Tom and Sarah had requested a traditional ceremony. The familiar words spread like balm from the 1566 Psalter of Dantheus across the centuries and across the ocean. I knew the phrases by heart – *baptism is a sign and a seal that our sins are washed away, presented without the stain of sin among the assembly of the elect, received into God's favour in Christ* – doctrine turned incantation, truths from Scripture recited through generations, hallowing the future for me, for my son, for his son. The pastor baptized Jakeb William Frederick Smith in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the tiny furrowed brow marked three times with the watery sign of the cross. The sacrament of infant baptism is a treasure that keeps me in church, a remarkable expression of the humble generosity of our Maker. Immortal God making irrevocable and eternal promises to Jakeb, nine pounds of squeaking flesh, completely unaware and unappreciative. Very God, knowing what it is to be a dependent bundle of bunched-up arms and legs, vowing to be Immanent



Scriptural truths recited through generations hallowed the future for me, for my son, for his son.

Presence, to be a shade at Jake's right hand. Sign language indeed, a mystery beyond even the noblest words. Not contract, not partnership, but God, the Perfect Parent, moving first, loving Jake before he could love back, before he was even born: "For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul; Always, always Thou lovedst me." C.S. Lewis put it this way: "We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too), but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the divine love may rest 'well pleased.'"

Sing for the goodness

After the baptism, Tom passed Jake to me. I tucked his balled-up form into the curve of my arm, inhaling his sweetness, warming his tiny fingers under my hand, while the pastor prayed a heartfelt prayer for him, for his parents and for all of God's people and then preached the old, old story. I held him while God's people filed past, congratulating us all, expressing love for our son and daughter-in-law and the newest member of their congregation. Not strangers, but God's people in Barrie, and so, my people, too.

Afterwards, we enjoyed lunch with Tom and Sarah's friends in the fellowship hall. Dipping a bun with cheese into steaming soup, enjoying cream puffs without compunction, drinking grape juice and coffee, the companionable meal was another holy circle, the Body and Blood relocated outside the sanctuary. Young fathers clearing dishes, grandmothers wiping tables, children clattering and laughing and little Jakeb in the middle safely asleep in his car seat on the floor. Church at its sacramental best.

All day my heart lay open to receiving God's goodness and was filled to overflowing. I only came close to tears once, singing the words of a Matt Redman song: "For all your goodness / I will keep on singing / Ten thousand reasons / for my heart to find."

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is Features Editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

Columns

Understanding violent acts and internet propaganda

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



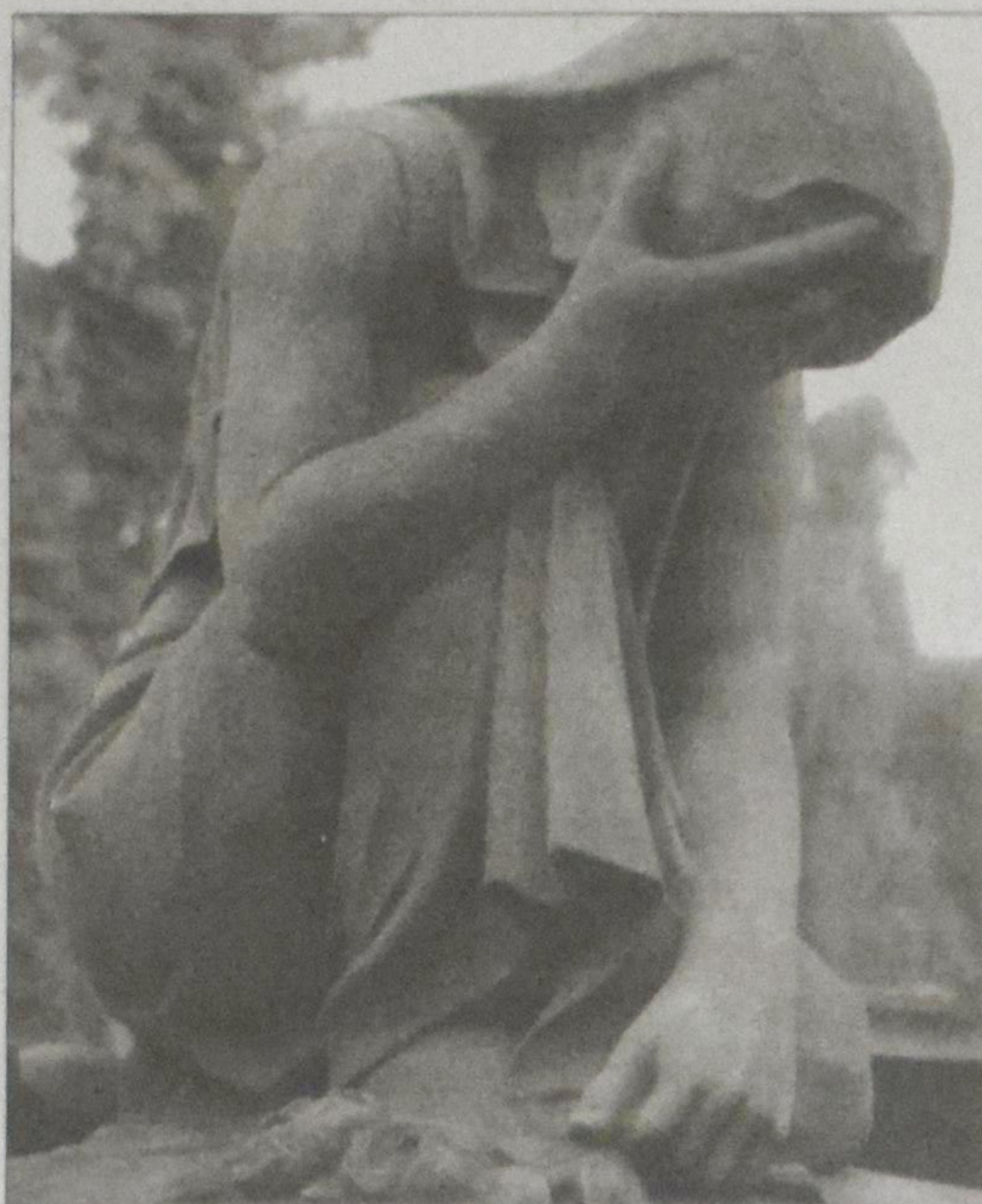
Q. I am a 30-year old Canadian woman and I recently received a forwarded email from an American friend. It covers an alleged speech recently given to the House Judiciary Committee's subcommittee by Darrell Scott, a Christian and the father of Rachel Scott. She was a victim of the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado, 12 years ago. In his speech, Scott refers to the story of Cain and Abel and stresses it was not the club Cain used that killed Abel, but his heart that bears the responsibility. He goes on to say that outlawing prayer in schools and not honoring God in America have left the door open for hatred and violence. His conclusion is that the real villain of these atrocities is within all of our hearts, but specifically those who have legislated God out of the classroom. Is the implicit solution for school violence then to bring God back into schools? For some reason this explanation troubles me, but I don't know why.

A. The above is an unusual problem for this column but I decided to tackle it because it is timely. There are two issues worth pondering: how Christians make sense of school shootings, and the legitimacy of emails targeting Christians.

First, it seems that the email you mention has been gathering steam on the internet lately, possibly because of the horrendous shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary and the hearings now taking place at the Senate Judiciary Committee regarding gun violence. It is not clear, however, whether Scott's comments were made during a recent presentation at the Judiciary subcommittee on gun violence or whether he spoke immediately after the Columbine shooting in 1999.

Still, there is no doubt that whenever atrocities like this happen, whether in Columbine or Newtown, we all experience a collective sadness for the lives lost through these violent and senseless acts. Nor can words express the sorrow parents and family feel after having lost loved ones in this manner.

Second, when horrendous tragedies happen we instinctively try to make sense out of them so that we can understand and possibly prevent them from happening again. Christians naturally wonder what role God plays in these painful situations. And so, it does not come as a surprise that Darrell Scott wants to draw our attention to Cain and Abel. Neither is it surprising that he blames the heart and more specifically the hearts of those who have legislated God out of the schools. To him, his view makes sense of his daughter's



Not all Christians will come to the same understanding of violent events like the Sandy Hook shootings.

tragic death and may bring him the comfort he needs.

A way of seeing

At this point, I wonder if you may be troubled by Darrell Scott putting forward a simple theological explanation for violent atrocities committed in a complicated, diverse and technically advanced culture that holds individual freedoms in high regard.

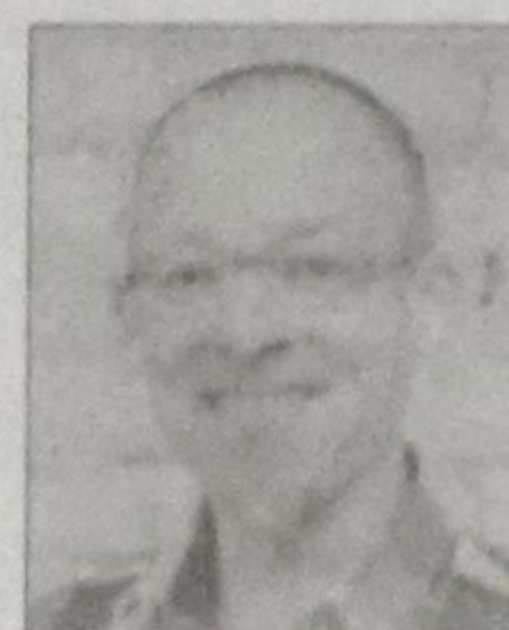
Other Christians are far less focused than Scott on whether God is in schools when prayer has been taken out of the daily routine. Consequently, they come to a different understanding of such violent events. They believe the causes of school shootings are complicated. And should investigations be done into the backgrounds of the gunmen, they believe there would be variables they have in common such as possible mental illness, frequent viewing of violent films, involvement in violent computer games, introverted personalities, lack of healthy faith and easy access to assault weapons . . . to name a few. All of which influence the heart. This way of seeing school violence is a more interdisciplinary way of viewing the ongoing tragedies. In turn, the solutions for preventing further atrocities of this kind would be influenced by examining the above possible causes, which in fact is happening right now at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on gun violence. Does that understanding of school tragedies resonate with you?

Finally, I want to draw your attention once more to that email. It is possible that the NRA is presently making use of Scott's simple theological explanation as to the cause of school violence in his speech of 1999 – which relieves them of any responsibilities in terms of gun violence – by encouraging faithful but gullible Christians to forward this kind of email to anyone they know. This unwittingly supports the NRA agenda that "guns don't kill people . . . people kill people."

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, BC.

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin



The other day a friend sent me a link to an old interview. It featured Alicia Salzer, the Director of a documentary called *Abomination: Homosexuality and the Ex-Gay Movement*. Salzer is also a psychiatrist who has researched religion and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

Listening to Salzer's interview, I agreed with some things she said. She described people who had undergone shock therapy to change their sexual preference. I agree that this is not humane and should not be used as "therapy." It did bother me, however, when she proceeded to paint the picture that people who believe that homosexuality is a sin are unloving and hate-filled – literally unable to be loving to those who disagree with her. Just as she was promoting a documentary of people feeling devalued, she too was devaluing others.

Now you may say, "Kenny, many LGBT people have felt devalued for many years and still do!" Does this make it right to devalue another group? Do two wrongs make a right?

As we dialogue with people and come to know their hearts, dreams and desires, it becomes quite evi-

dent that their lives are complex and rich with experiences that have helped shape them. We cannot separate those experiences from who they are today. Each of us is affected by our parental lineage, our upbringing and the environment that we grew up in.

Alicia Salzer left me with the impression that anyone of faith who strives to live a life toward holiness ends up hurting other people. When in reality, finding our place at the cross of Jesus is a wonderful and freeing place, not something negative. Knowing that we find our selves FREE is good news indeed. As we let go of shame and guilt, we can walk with greater dignity and love for ourselves and for others. Even with continued struggles, no matter what they are.

Submit, don't measure

Maybe the bigger issue is that for years the church has proclaimed that after becoming a Christian, your life will be easy, which left those who did contin-

Life is grace and mercy

ue to struggle wondering and questioning the authenticity of their worth and faith.

For many years, I looked at everyone around me as perfect, without blemishes or spots. I felt like I never measured up well to the standard of a good Christian, especially as I struggled with my gender. It wasn't going away, so what was I doing wrong?

Now I look at my life as a place of grace and mercy. This took years of self discovery and submission to Jesus. In today's culture "submission" is a word that makes people cringe. But when we don't submit, we can unconsciously think that we are more important than any other being . . . even God. So to submit my sexuality, my gender identity and my worth to God was significant to me. It wasn't any longer a feeling of self sabotage or that God was this mean creator who wouldn't

allow me to identify as a gay man. Instead, I grew to know him as a wonderful creator who called me into the fullness of who I was as a man and defined my sexuality in his terms. In submitting I honor him, not because I fear discipline but out of love and respectful acknowledgement that he is holy and just.

My struggle with same gender attraction used to define me and cause me to believe I was born gay. As I have discovered and faced the ways I

was parented and how I perceived the world around me and interpreted events that took place, I have uncovered the real Kenny. I'm not pretending anymore. Now I'm extremely honest with myself and with others about my life. This includes the realities of walking in submission to the one I call Father: a God who doesn't make mistakes, but one who calls we worthy, loved, cherished. I am his favorite son! Blemishes and all!

When I know my worth as God's son, it helps me to walk in grace with those who hold a different worldview than mine, that they too are valued and deeply loved beyond their understanding. To love God is to love my neighbour regardless of how they see me or value me.

Kenny Warkentin (kenny66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.



It's not helpful when the church suggests that Christian life is struggle-free.

News



Winnipeg Indian Family Centre

Rediscovering a Canadian legacy at the Indian Family Centre

John de Vries

When I arrived at the Winnipeg Indian Family Centre in January, my thoughts flashed back 40 years. In 1972, preliminary discussions led to the launching of a Winnipeg Christian Reformed Church (CRC) Indian ministry – the first of three Christian Reformed Aboriginal ministries in Western Canada. The late Rev. Henk de Bruyn, who first developed the ministry, was part of the planning. Rev. Arie Van Eek and the late Rev. Henry de Moor Sr. also joined in shaping a beginning vision. By God's grace, the prayers and strategizing of several CRC immigrant clergy birthed the Winnipeg Indian Family Centre, which has far exceeded our initial dreams and prayers. Forty years later it was exhilarating to be invited by Director Michele Visser to facilitate Restorative Justice Circle training.

Despite two devastating fires during its 40 year history, the Indian Family Centre now has an amazing building with lots of space for circles, nutritional cooking, drama projects, drum practice, a drop-in-library and prayer meetings. Three years ago Visser was hired to lead the Centre. Right from the start she began nurturing new dreams.

Health, healing and wholeness

are the Centre's ministry focus. These are approached from the corners of the medicine wheel. These facilitate "loving the Lord with heart, mind, body and soul" and dynamic community engagement. The unique cooking program and food production provides healthy food, which is sold and catered to a community where many suffer from diabetes. In recent years, more men and women's sharing groups have been initiated.

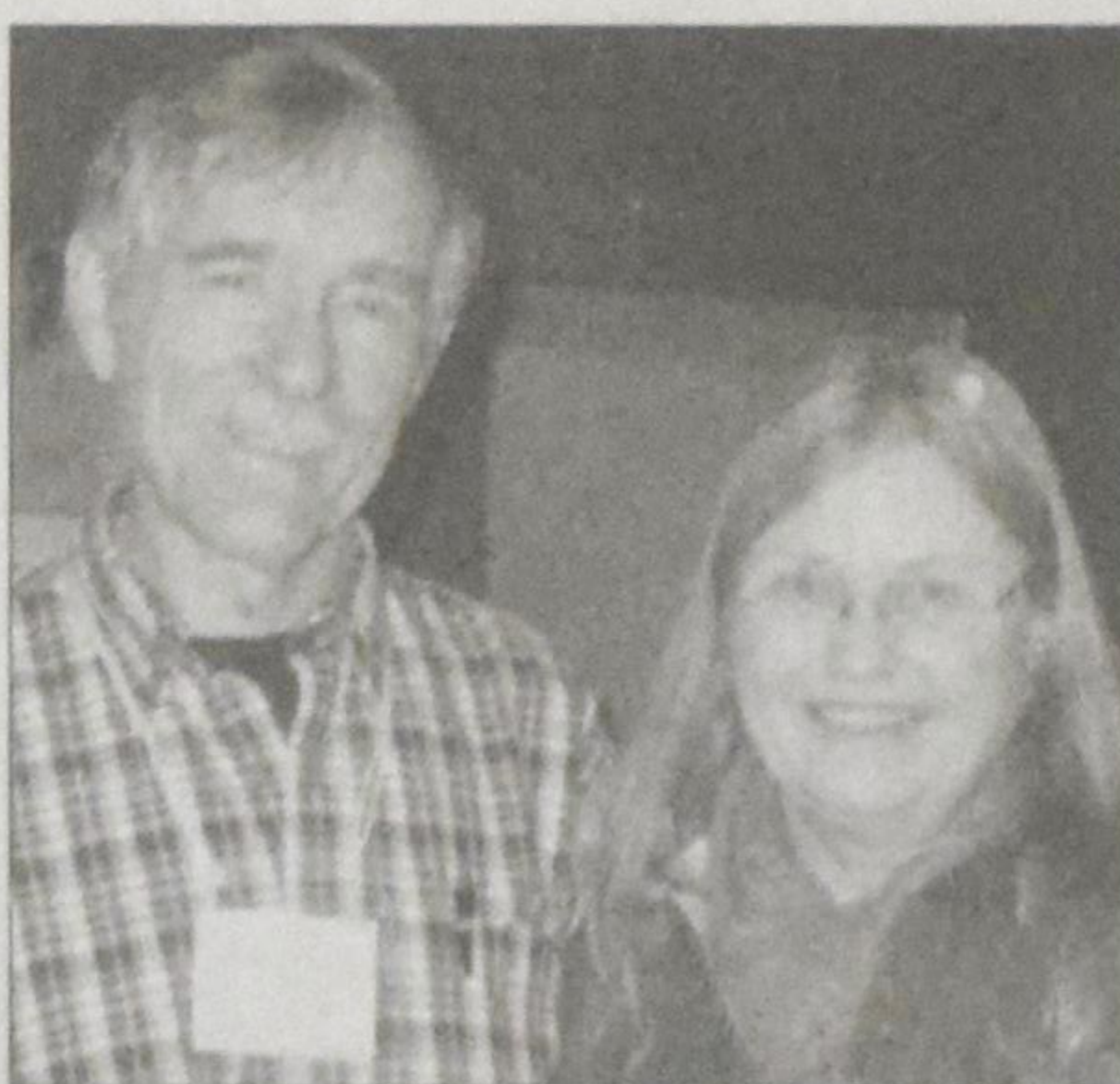
Alternative justice

All at the Centre take pride in the fact that Aboriginal culture was the first Canadian culture. While there are literacy needs, domestic violence, street crime and jail – all of which impact meaningful ministries – the re-introduction of the Aboriginal healing circle is one way to revive indigenous practices to enhance our life together as Canadians. Criminal justice systems focused primarily on punishment lacks what it takes to heal community brokenness.

The Restorative Justice training was set up to coincide with a Church Council on Justice and Corrections (CCJC) board meeting in Winnipeg on Jan. 24. With temperatures dipping below

minus 30 degrees Celsius, everyone added extra layers of clothes in the morning. During the evening Restorative Justice Circle training, layers of emotional blockages came off.

After circle smudging and centering, Sarah Chandler and I introduced the circle training process and role play. The healing circle, a treasure lost, is a rediscovered indigenous practice. In two circles the 25 participants acted out a church conflict situation. Everyone got into their roles and shared observations and feelings. When the person with the feather spoke, everyone in the circle listened. It became sacred space. Speaking participants were empowered. At the end of the role-play, participants drafted an agreement satisfactory to the harm-doer, the harmed and all af-



John DeVries and Sarah Chandler.

fectured persons to "make things right, as right as possible." The agreement made all, and especially the harm-doer, accountable. Prison and punishment do not do that – nor does prison bring closure, or prepare the harm-doer for life in the community.

Invited to the table

The 25 circle participants were positively impacted by shaping an agreement satisfactory to all. At least five participants committed themselves to use this healing circle practice in their life situations. Restorative justice circles have returned home to the Aboriginal community, where they were commonly practiced before the industrial era.

As Director Michel Visser

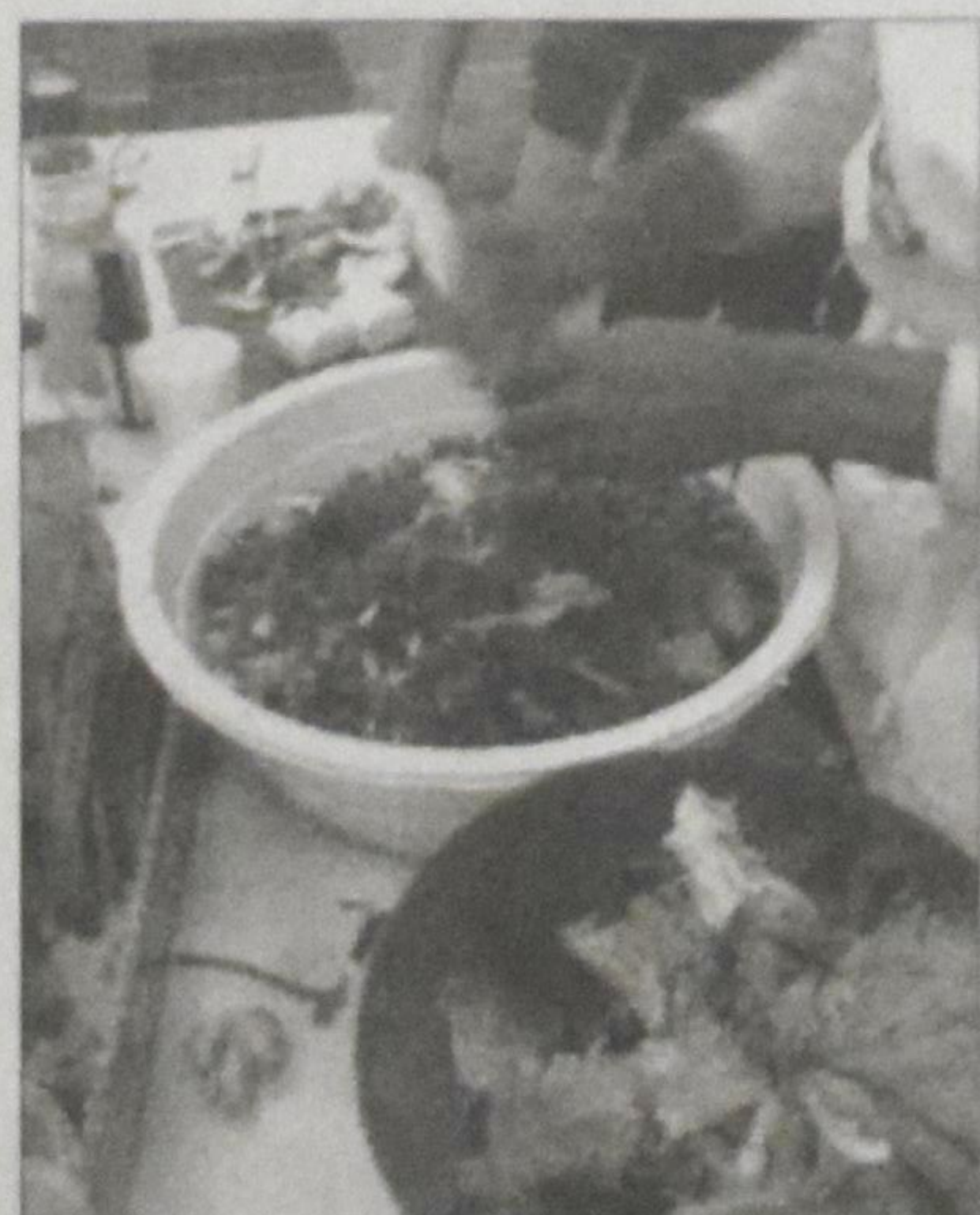
states well, the ministry is uniquely Christian and Reformed: "Everything we do is permeated with the love of God. Reformed theology allows us to honestly examine Aboriginal culture to discuss all those practices that point to the Triune God and the work of Jesus as redeemer."

The lost legacy of Canada's indigenous culture is being re-discovered as part of a growing ministry in a neighbourhood where 85 to 90 percent of the residents are Aboriginal. The Restorative circle provides a healing alternative to our criminal justice system that is built on Roman law which punishes more and heals less. The circle facilitates reconciliation and sets the table so that forgiveness may happen.

Rev. John de Vries Jr. is the Canadian Christian Reformed Restorative Justice Coordinator, and vice-president of the Church Council on Justice and Corrections. He lives in London, Ont.

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Classifieds

Anniversaries



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JOHN AND RIA JAGER
on March 5th.

Congratulations from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



JOHN AND TINA TOLSMAN

It is with praise and thanksgiving to our God, that on March 2, 2013, DV, we hope to celebrate the **65th wedding anniversary** of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

Art & Enica Tolsma

Alecia & Rick Merrihew (Tyler, Kyle, Allyson, Caleb)
John-Paul & Stacey Tolsma (Emily)
Nicole & Matthew Schroeder
James Tolsma

Marg & Win Elzinga

Aaron & Jolene Medenblik (Grace, Maggie Jo)
Michelle Medenblik

Rita & Brad Moor

Laura Moor & Ryan Riczu
Kaitlyn Moor & Kyle Campbell
Samantha Moor
Linda & Gerry Wolting

Kristy & Scott May (Reagan, Ryleigh)

Kevin & Jackie Wolting
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Home address: 3 Wilhelmina Way
Chatham ON N7M 6M3

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FRITS AND GRACE DATEMA (de Vries)

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Mathilda Tisseur – Ont.
Ralph & Pat Datema – Ont.
Anita Wilson – B.C.
Frank & Boni Datema – B.C.
14 grandchildren
and 14 great-grandchildren

An **Open House** will be held on March 23, 2013 from 2-4 pm in the Horizon Hall at Holland Christian Homes 45 King Knoll Dr, Brampton, Ont. *Best wishes only.*

We wish them God's blessings, our love and congratulations.
Proverbs 3:16

Correspondence: 603-45 King Knoll Dr
Brampton ON L6Y 5P2

1953

2013

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And lean not on your own understanding
In all your ways acknowledge him
and he will make your paths straight.*

With great thankfulness to the Lord for his faithfulness
Our parents and grandparents

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Peter Vandergeest & Luin Goldring – Toronto
Emma, Liora

Anthony Vandergeest & Alice Ann Tangelier – Kitchener
Christian, Brendan, Caleb

E. Martin Vandergeest, – St. Thomas
William Vandergeest – London

Anne & Maurice Veldhuis – Moorefield
Jessica, William, Andrew, Shae-Lynn

May God continue to bless and lead them.

Home Address: J. & W. Vandergeest
C318-600 Saulsbury St., Strathroy ON N7G 0A8

Obituaries

William Louis Vander Beek

June 6, 1928 – February 8, 2013

*"Let us then approach God's throne of grace
with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy and find
grace to help us in our time of need."*
Hebrews 4:16

William Louis Vander Beek went to be with his Lord and Saviour on Friday, Feb. 8, 2013 at the age of 84 years.

He was the beloved husband of Gertie (nee Meijer) for 56 years, and father of Peter Vander Beek presently of Oskaloosa, Iowa; Joan (Frank) DeVries of Burlington, Ont.; George (Jane) Vander Beek presently of Costa Rica; John (Vanessa) Vander Beek of Coaldale, Alta; Michael Vander Beek of Fauquier, B.C.; and Lisa Vander Beek of Edgerwood, B.C.

He will also be missed by his 19 grandchildren.

Correspondence: Gertie Vander Beek
27- 2312 18 Street
Coaldale AB T1M 1N8

January 24, 1917 – February 11, 2013

Jentje "Jim" Andela

Peacefully, surrounded by his family, dad was called home to be with his Lord and Saviour, on Monday Feb. 11, 2013, in his 97th year.

Beloved husband of Anna Andela† (nee Bergstra). Loving father of John (Corey) Andela, Louis (Tina) Andela, Berendina (John) O'Hara, and Jeanette (Tom) MacDonald.

Cherished Opa of 10 and great-grandfather of six. Survived by his brother Jaap Andela (Ge), and his sister Jantje (Wiebe†) Sijperda, his sister-in-law Wilma and his brother-in-law Wiegert tenCate.

Predeceased by brother Hessel Andela, his sister Maatje tenCate and his grandson Sean David O'Hara.

Due to Jeanette's current mission trip in the Honduras, visitation will take place at MacCoubrey Funeral Home (30 King St. E. Cobourg) on Fri. Mar. 1, 2013 from 2-4 and 7-9 pm.

A **funeral service** will take place on Sat. Mar. 2, 2013 at Grace Christian Reformed Church (440 King St. E. Cobourg) at 11 am.

Correspondence: Louis & Tina Andela
8 Dunrobin Dr., Caledonia ON N3W 2N8



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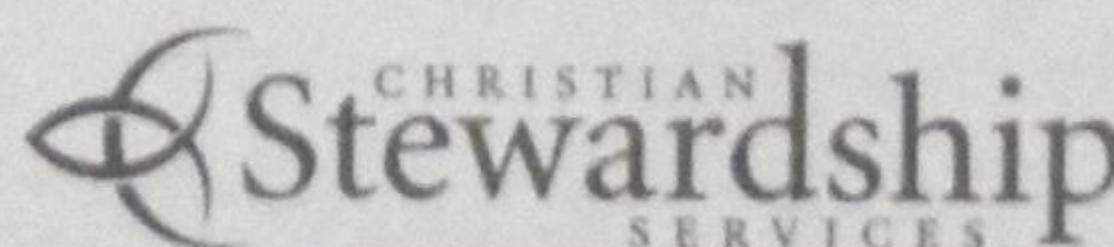
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Job Opportunities

Job Opportunities

PRINCIPAL / LEAD ADMINISTRATOR – K-12



Houston Christian School was founded in 1962 and is a K-12 school with approximately 100 students. Houston BC is a small town of about 3200 residents. Our community has a strong Christian base and students come mainly from Christian Reformed, Canadian Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal families. The school is grateful for the solid and stable family character of its education program and marvels at the faithfulness of our God as alumni repeatedly come back and report how positive their

experience at our school was. Over the past few years the school has focused intensely on developing more intentional Christian teaching using the Teaching for Transformation format developed by the prairie Christian schools in all curriculum areas. Houston Christian School is an active member of the Society of Christian Schools in BC (SCSBC).

Houston Christian School is accepting applications for a full-time teaching principal / lead administrator commencing August 1, 2013. In the past this principal position was 50% administration and 50% teaching. The Board is open to input on this model and is keenly interested in candidates who will commit to leading development of the school's administrative systems and procedures. The successful candidate will be expected to creatively leverage the strengths of a small school and further strengthen the school's education program and operations to the praise and glory of our God.

The ideal candidate must:

- be a committed Christian
- qualify for BC professional teacher certification
- be dedicated to Christian education
- be able to sign the school's Code of Conduct
- have experience and skill in educational and curricular leadership
- have a minimum of 4-5 years of administrative experience as head teacher, vice principal, or principal
- be committed to professional development. Preference will be given to the candidate who holds or is working towards a Master's degree in Educational Leadership
- have excellent communication abilities and work well with educators, school board, various committee volunteers, and administrative staff
- have solid comprehension and leadership abilities in all school administration and operations
- be able to lead a dedicated group of staff in serving the vision and mission of Houston Christian School

Each application must include:

- an up-to-date resume
- at least 3 professional references including pertinent contact information
- copies of university transcripts
- a written personal philosophy of Christian education and leadership

Closing date: March 15, 2013

Mail or email your application to:

Houston Christian School
Attn: Keith Jaarsma, Board Chair
Box 237 2161 Caledonia Ave.
Houston BC V0J 1Z0

Ph: 250.845.7736 (school office) or
250.845.5230 Keith's day number
250.845.7832 Keith's eve number
Email: kdjarsma@telus.net

Immanuel CRC is a progressive and dynamic church serving the communities of Brampton and Caledon, Ontario, Canada. We are seeking a

Ministry Director

who will be responsible for managing and supporting our vision, staff and ministries, with the objective to enhance the execution of all our ministries.

For a detailed job description go to immanuelcrc.ca and click on "What's Happening."

All interested candidates are asked to submit their resume before March 31, 2013, along with a letter detailing their interests in the Ministry Director position, along with salary expectations to

careers@immanuelcrc.ca.

Please note that only qualified applicants will be contacted.

Cornerstone CRC
of Chilliwack, BC

has an immediate opening for a half time

Director of Worship/Music

The qualified applicant will have a deep love for Christ and His Church and a passion to give expression to our Reformed world-view utilizing a broad range of musical skills in a "blended" worship setting.

For a position description and to submit a resume and application please contact the church office at

office@cornerstonecra.ca
or 1-604-792-2517

Bethel CRC, Dunnville, Ont., is searching for a

Music Director

This is a part time position (up to 10 hours per week). The qualified applicant will have an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and give expression of a Reformed/biblical worldview utilizing a broad range of musical skills in a "blended worship" setting.

A full job description is available from the church at

bethel@dunnvillecra.ca

Submit your cover letter with resume of applicable skills to

Pastor Frank Engelage at

mc4bethel@dunnvillecra.ca

Only applicants selected for interview will be contacted.

Calvin CRC, Ottawa, Ont., is seeking a

Lead Pastor

Supported by capable lay leaders and a full-time Pastor of Youth and Congregational Life, the successful candidate is a strong Reformed-Biblical preacher who will challenge our diverse congregation and encourage us to live as Christ's followers in Canada's capital.

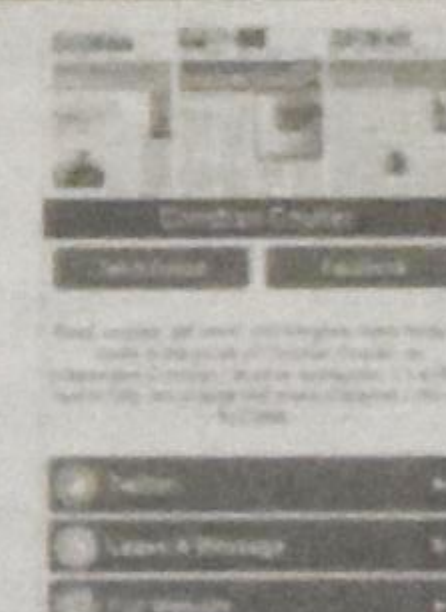
Our new pastor will guide us in framing our aspirations into a new, Spirit-led vision statement and core values.

Contact Larry Vandergrift, Chair of the Search Committee,

at larryvandergrift@rogers.com to request copies of the church profile and job description.



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CC SEEKING APPLICATIONS
FOR REVIEW EDITOR

If you love film, fiction, poetry, theatre, music and memoirs, and you frequently give others advice on what to see/read/listen to, then this job might be for you. *Christian Courier* is looking for an articulate Review Editor to engage with a variety of media from a Reformed, Christian perspective by editing three and writing one review per month. Reviews should include a thorough summary and a thoughtful, spiritually-informed critique with a redemptive bent (turn to page 9 for two examples).

It's worth noting that this opportunity is unique. "The role of the critic in the place of the contemporary world of media has been reduced to 5-star ranking systems," Nick Schuurman, outgoing Review Editor, says. "That this is a distinctly Christian publication allows for the role of Review Editor to be something much richer than that; works of art can be understood in terms of expressions of our creaturely capabilities, for good and for ill, and viewed in terms of God's redemptive agenda."

For more information, email Angela Reitsma Bick at editor@christiancourier.ca. Resumes will be accepted until March 30, 2013.

INTERESTED IN WRITING?

Christian Courier is looking for two new columnists to contribute one 750-word article each (per month). We would like an emphasis on pop culture, fatherhood, economics or medicine but all proposals will be considered. Interested and experienced writers should send two sample columns to editor@christiancourier.ca by March 30, 2013. Content should reflect the principles of God's sovereignty and our mandate to interact with and reform culture. View some of our current columnists at christiancourier.ca.

CHRISTIANCOURIER

Events/Advertising

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Saturday March 9, 2013 at 8.00 PM

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Friday March 15, 2013 at 8.00 PM

Memorial Community Hall in Blyth, Ontario

Saturday March 23, 2013 at 8.00 PM

Great Lakes Christian College in Beamsville, Ontario

Saturday April 6, 2013 at 2.00 PM

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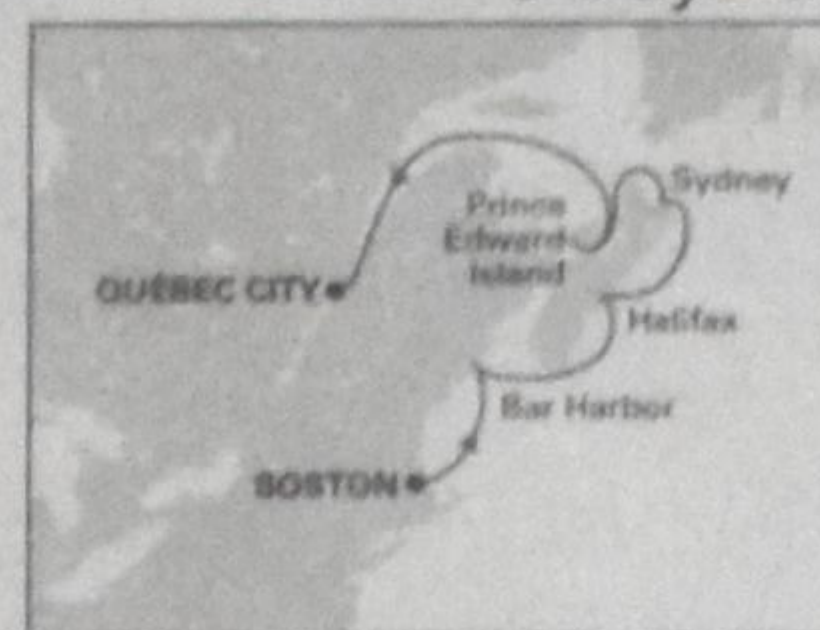
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mar 8, 9 Dutch Theatre Group presents "Een Bomvol Hotel" Woodstock, Ont. See ad.

Mar 10 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster CRC** at 3:00 p.m.
Rev. John Klomps will be preaching. DVDs are available

Mar 15 Dutch Theatre Group presents "Een Bomvol Hotel" **London**
Dutch Canadian Hall, 8 pm. See ad.

Mar 23 Dutch Theatre Group presents "Een Bomvol Hotel" Memorial
Community Hall, 8 pm. **Blyth**, Ont. See ad.

Apr 6 Dutch Theatre Group presents "Een Bomvol Hotel" Great Lakes
Christian College, **Beamsville**, Ont. 2 pm. See ad.

Apr 27 Holland Marsh CRC, Ont., is celebrating their 75th anniversary.
More information to follow in March issues.

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News

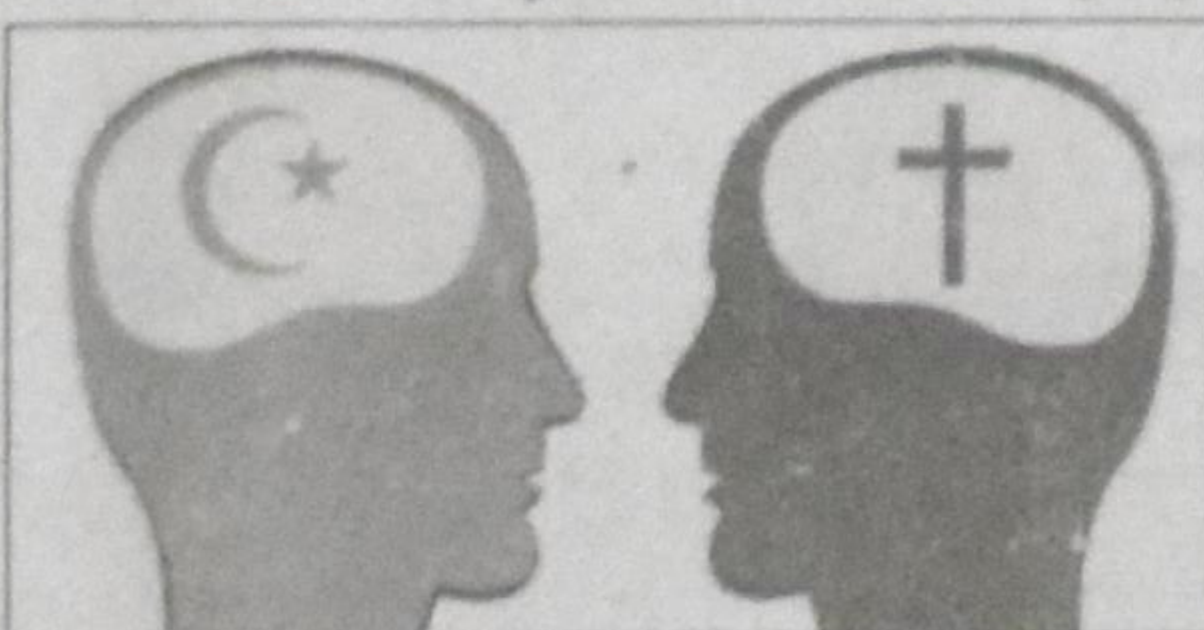


The Salaam Project: Beyond fury and fear toward friendship

Greg Sinclair

Salaam Project's beginning goes back to September 11, 2001, when Islam came very suddenly into our collective consciousness. Afterwards, some North Americans became suspicious of Muslims. Others suddenly realized that they had little knowledge or connections with the Muslims in their neighbourhood. In response, CRCNA agency leaders came together to create a response for Christian Reformed Church (CRC) members to lovingly connect with their Muslim neighbours. The church has interacted with Muslims through the ages (more negatively through the Crusades, more positively through Saint Francis of Assisi and Samuel Zwemer). Current world changes such as globalization are confronting the church with a new reality: the presence of people of other faiths in our communities. Approximately one quarter of all current Canadian immigrants is Muslim. By 2031, the population of Muslims in the Greater Toronto Area is projected to increase from 500,000 to two million, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. How do we live as Christians in a pluralistic society where we daily rub shoulders with people of other faith traditions? How is God calling us to engage with them?

Salaam Project seeks to equip



New ministry details:

Salaam Project is a resource for CRC churches, individuals and institutions. Whether you have a Muslim presence in your community or you have questions about Islam based on what you read in the newspaper, we hope you will make use of this new ministry to learn more about reaching out to Muslims.

For more information please check out our website at crcna.org/salaam or contact Greg Sinclair at gsinclair@crcna.org.



CRWM GO conference in January focused on Islam.

and encourage CRC members to engage with Muslims. Our goal is to help in three areas: education, Christian witness and inter-faith dialogue. These tracks are available to churches and institutions through seminars and conferences.

The reality is that many of us do not know a lot about Islam, the Quran or the prophet Muhammad. Muslims have many misconceptions about us, just as we have many misconceptions about them. Many Muslims believe that the Trinity consists of God, Jesus and Mary! They believe that God cannot have a son, and that Christians believe Jesus is God's Son because God had sex with Mary. These misconceptions can be corrected through dialogue with biblically literate Christians.

Practicing hospitality

Salaam Project seeks to encourage a positive atmosphere for dialogue and witness by appreciating our Muslim neighbours. We encourage listening to the experience of the other. Bridges can only be built in this kind of environment. Although

we acknowledge the sinful condition of humanity and her institutions, we seek to find signs of God's presence and redemptive work in other faiths, signs that ultimately point people to Jesus Christ and his saving work.

Recent terrorist acts by Islamist groups have caused a lot of people to fear Islam, or they have become angry. Fear, fury and fascination well cover the range of reactions and emotions among Christians when the word Islam is mentioned. That is why Salaam Project seeks to nurture peace building dialogue and witness between Christians and Muslims (*salaam* means peace in Arabic). We are reminded that our job as Christians is to be good hosts to people of many different faiths who settle in Canada. When we offer hospitality, we make room for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of people. It is the Holy Spirit's role to convict and convert.

Greg Sinclair (gsinclair@crcna.org) is the Ministry Co-ordinator for Salaam Project. He

lives in Hamilton, Ont.



Listening to others builds peace and Christian witness.

Odds and Trends

Milky Way navigation

Last month *National Geographic* reported on a new study that proves dung beetles navigate via the Milky Way, the first known species in the animal kingdom to do so. Recent experiments in South Africa demonstrated that the tiny insects "can orient themselves to the bright stripe of light generated by our galaxy, and move in a line relative to it." Biologist Eric Warrant calls this a "complicated navigational feat, quite impressive for an animal that size."

During the day, dung beetles plot a straight course by using special photoreceptors in their eyes to detect a symmetrical pattern of light that appears around the sun. Scientists already knew that, but they couldn't figure out how the nocturnal African dung beetle did the same thing, even on moonless nights. Navigation is important for these beetles because they roll balls of dung away from competition before hiding them.

The experiment involved placing sets of dung beetles in boxes to observe how they reacted to different sky conditions. On clear, moonless nights the beetles could travel in a straight line. Wearing little cardboard hats that blocked their view, however, the insects rolled around and around aimlessly.

Next scientists want to study whether other insects have this skill, and if artificial light negatively impacts their ability to boldly go where no dung beetle has gone before.



Fitted with a clear hat, this dung beetle is in the control group.

College Quidditch



Will it replace hockey?

If you've read *Harry Potter*, you've heard of the magical sport called Quidditch played in its pages. But did you know that college students have invented a muggle-friendly Quidditch World Cup in the real world? Tired of bocce ball, a group of friends at Middlebury College in Vermont decided to try playing Quidditch on the ground. These were kids who had grown up reading *Harry Potter*, and the fun was infectious: soon, a whole assortment of Potter fans across the U.S. and Canada formed teams, agreed on rules and set up an international Quidditch League, which culminates in the World Cup each year.

The game is described as "part soccer, part rugby and part capture-the-flag – if the flag wore sparkly yellow tights and sprinted around the field." The sprinting yellow "flag," or Snitch, is the genius of this adaptation: it's a human not on either team. Seekers have to catch the living Snitch – the only player without a broom and allowed to break all the rules.

There are two teams of seven players (as Rowlings imagined); the Quaffle is a slightly deflated volleyball and the Bludgers are dodge balls. The Keepers defend mounted basketball hoops. The game has brought athletes and self-described bookish nerds together, united in their love for *Harry Potter*.

"I was in fifth grade when I first read HP," one girl explains. "Now I'm in college playing Quidditch. I can't believe there are people nerdy enough to do it with me! It's amazing."

If the *Harry Potter* series can inspire a generation in its late teens to bring a magical sport to life, maybe – once these kids turn 20 – it will inspire real action in the age-old battle between good and evil. Now that would be amazing.

—Angela Reitsma Bick